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Cabarrus Center seeks next class of entrepreneurs for retail boot camp this spring

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The Retail Lab Boot Camp is a six-week program for early-stage business owners in Cabarrus and Rowan counties. Cabarrus Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation

By Caroline Hudson - Staff Writer
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The Cabarrus Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship is accepting applications for its Retail Lab Boot Camp in the spring.

The boot camp, which launched in a pilot last fall, is a six-week program for early-stage business owners in Cabarrus and Rowan counties. This latest camp is focused on retail, specifically products and services, said **Brittany Burton**, program manager for the Flywheel Foundation at the Cabarrus Center.

"As with any pilot program, we learned a whole lot about what our community needs," Burton said. "We've really taken what we learned and what we surveyed them and what they responded and have fine-tuned this program to serve a very specific population. I think we went a little bit too broad with it first go-round, even though it was very impactful."

Eligible business owners may be considering a brick-and-mortar store, or they may just have an idea and want to get started.

Last year's cohort had 14 graduates. The camp is mostly in-person with online components, Burton said. This session will run from March 23 through May 4 from 6-8 p.m. on Wednesdays at the Cabarrus Center in downtown Concord.

The Cabarrus Center collaborated on the curriculum with the Small Business Center at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. Topics include business basics, such as incorporation and trademarking; business models and how to get funding; branding and marketing; setting up for e-commerce; point-of-sale and inventory systems; and navigating the real estate landscape.

"I just truly believe that this program is such a great launch pad for people who are on the cusp of really growing their business," Burton said.

Tameron Davenport, founder of Positive Outlook Grooming, was one of the graduates last fall. Her business, started in 2016, specializes in all-natural, handmade men's grooming products. Davenport's inspiration stems from the tragic deaths of her father, stepmother and brothers in a plane crash in 1987. She wanted to — and continues to — pay their love forward.

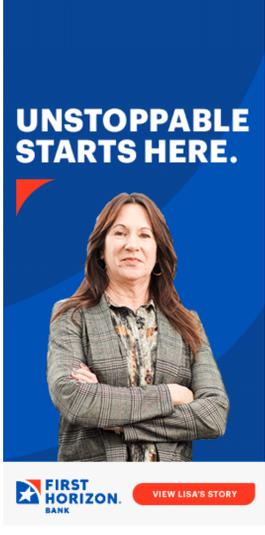
Davenport's products range from body butter to beard oil to soaps. Her vision is to have a manufacturing and distribution facility in North Carolina within the next five years. She is currently rebranding and looking to extend her online product reach.

Davenport said the boot camp program is an invaluable opportunity.

Participants will have the opportunity to pitch to the Cabarrus Entrepreneurship Council for potential grant funding. Some have the option to join a co-op store in downtown Concord. That venture, which does include Davenport's products, is set for a grand opening in March. Vendors using the store will rotate every six months, Burton said. She is also working to bring in more established retailers to increase foot traffic.

"We're going to be using that as a learning tool for future cohorts," Burton said. "It was like a happy accident that we came upon that. It wasn't what we intended, but I think it's really going to work well for all future cohorts of this program to have the opportunity to participate in a co-op when they finish."

Program participants will receive a three-month Flywheel coworking membership, including space at the Cabarrus Center. Applications [will be accepted](#) through Feb. 27.



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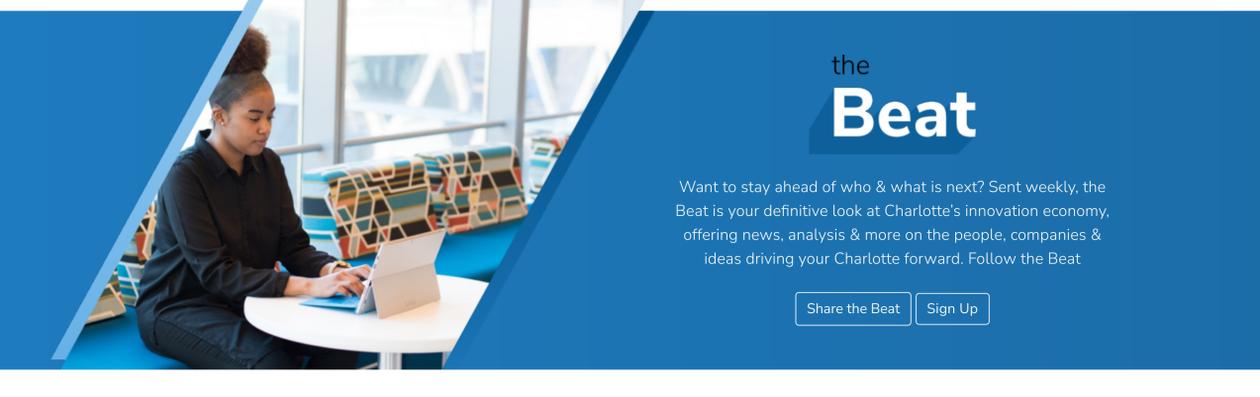
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