

SBA's McMahon brings listening tour to Baltimore incubator

By: Tim Curtis Daily Record Business Reporter August 15, 2017

Small Business Administrator Linda McMahon wants businesses and entrepreneurs to know that her agency does more than loans and can be a resource and advocate for the small business community.

McMahon stopped in north Baltimore at B-More Kitchen as part of a nationwide tour of listening to business owners and educating them about the SBA's services.

"I am determined to make it no longer a well-kept secret," McMahon said in an interview. "So many people think of the SBA and they think of loans. The SBA is so much more than loans, it's the counseling and the mentoring programs through our SCORE offices, our women's centers, our small business development centers."

As part of this Ignite Tour, she will visit the SBA's 68 district offices over the next two years. Included in those tours, will be roundtable discussions with local business leaders, like one McMahon attended after touring B-More Kitchen.

"It's really to talk about SBA, its programs, its projects, what it does to listen to our business community about the issues that they are facing so that I can be a better advocate for them up in Washington," she said.

McMahon joined President Donald Trump's administration after losing U.S. Senate races in Connecticut as the Republican nominee in 2010 and 2012. Before running for elected office, McMahon was the president and CEO of wrestling company WWE. Her husband, Vince McMahon, is still the majority owner, chairman and CEO of the company.

The B-More Kitchen space is a food incubator launched to provide a co-working space for the city's food entrepreneurs. It houses a large commercial kitchen where food startups can both cook and gain access to resources to help launch their business.

It also has office and event space and will soon be welcoming Full Tilt Brewery as part of an expansion.

In touring the facility, McMahon saw how the B-More residents can rely on each other and help each other's businesses grow, including catering businesses at B-More Kitchen's upstairs event space.

"The revenue then comes back down to these small businesses and that was part of his dream for the upstairs event space," she said. "When you have a champion like (Jonathan Fishman, B-More Kitchen's founder) who has a concept to put people together like that so they do collaborate."

McMahon also talked about finding ways to help small businesses navigate a regulatory landscape that can often be onerous.

In some cases she has found, things like a misplaced comma or bathroom sizes can be more over-regulations than necessary.

"You advocate for them back in Congress and you talk about how the regulatory environment needs to be reduced," she said. "Not one person I interview ever says we don't need any regulations. They understand that you need regulations. ... I think that there has to be some kind of common sense in looking at regulations as well. They can't be 'gotcha' stuff."



SBA Administrator Linda McMahon tours the B-More Kitchen in Baltimore Tuesday. (Maximilian Franz)

Beyond advocating for business owners and the small business loans her agency provides, McMahon also talked up some of the services the Small Business Administration offers. Those include counseling for entrepreneurs who have an idea, but have not figured out how to create a business plan or manage their cash flow. It can also apply to business owners who have an idea that they want to take to scale.

After touring the sights and smells of the B-More Kitchens, McMahon came away with an appreciation for the services Fishman provides, services not so different from what she described the SBA provides.

“Jonathan just delights in what he’s been able to create here,” she said. “Yes, it’s a business. Yes, he’s making it run. And yes, he’s produced a model that he wants to be able to run in other cities. But you can see in his face the sheer satisfaction of providing opportunity to people who wouldn’t ordinarily have it.”

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