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THE EAST SIDER

## Karina Wood spearheads a new CCRI program to stimulate small businesses

Karina Wood relocated to Providence from Washington, DC in 1997 and was recently hired to pioneer a dynamic new educational program taught at CCRI to help grow small business in RI.

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PHOTO BY MIKE BRACA

By Amanda M. Grosvenor

**Karina Wood** relocated to Providence from Washington, DC in 1997 and has been living in different East Side neighborhoods ever since, currently calling the Blackstone/Summit neighborhood home. She earned her bones here as a community activist, among other things leading the incredible write in campaign that almost unseated Kevin Jackson in 2014. With a professional background in fields like communications and government relations, Wood is shifting gears and was recently hired to pioneer a dynamic new educational program taught at CCRI to help grow small business in RI.

**10,000 Small Businesses (10KSB)** (<http://www.CCRI.Edu/10ksb>) is an educational program created by the Goldman Sachs Foundation. It is currently in 12 US cities and demonstrating success, which is why Governor Raimondo petitioned to get Rhode Island on board in an effort to improve our economic climate. Goldman Sachs partnered with renowned entrepreneurship school Babson College to develop a course that “helps small businesses grow and create jobs by providing them with greater access to education, financial capital and business-support services.” Partnering with community colleges helps make the program as accessible as possible, which is why CCRI was chosen.

“Community colleges are where different forms of business education are being pioneered and flourishing,” says Wood. “10,000 Small Businesses places a strong emphasis on peer learning and group work, where small business owners are put into smaller groups to work with each other. What we’re doing is not only imparting knowledge from the faculty, but also facilitating business owners to learn from each other and grow within a network of peer support.”

If accepted, attendees enjoy full scholarships. Admission is selective, and base requirements specify that the business must have existed for at least two years, bring in at least \$100K yearly in gross revenue and have at least two employees. Only business owners or co-owners may participate in the course, since they are the principle decision-makers and the ones able to effect the most change. Wood estimates that the three-month program, akin to a “mini MBA,” takes up about 10-15 hours weekly between coursework and homework.

“I’m very passionate about anything that can help Rhode Island invest in the small businesses of our state.” she says. “I really liked the idea of working at the nexus of education, small business development and community enhancement.”

**If you had one wish to enhance life on the East Side, what would it be?**

“My wish is for more local businesses, institutions, associations and individuals to find ways to engage with and support local public schools. When my daughters were at Vartan Gregorian Elementary, the Wickenden Street aquarium owner donated a fish tank filled with fish to one classroom every year and came in each month to maintain them. ‘Dr. Fish’ became part of our school community. Brown University athletic teams each ‘adopt’ a class at Vartan and visit weekly, reading together and inspiring each other. I hope more community members form connections with local public schools to enrich education on the East Side and citywide.”

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