

YOU

can make the easy argument that Ben Holzem has always been good with his hands. Growing up in Chippewa Falls, Wis., Holzem took several wood-working classes in high school. Those classes evolved into a four-hour daily capstone class his junior and senior years in which he did projects such as cabinetry and wiring.

Holzem graduated from Chippewa Valley Technical College with a degree in machine tool technology, and he has been a part of the machine trade since 1986, having worked in multiple shops such as Cray Research, Riverside Machine and McNally Industries before starting his own in 2006 in Spooner, Wis.



Having no formal business training, Ben Holzem turned to the SBDC.

"I wanted to be in control of my career," Holzem said. "Starting my own business has allowed me to have greater control and steer my career in the direction I want it to go."

Made up of two full-time employees and one part-time employee, Holzem Machine is a self-described high-quality precision job shop that offers turning, milling and grinding services. It manufactures batches of parts for clients who usually don't have the capability to produce such parts in-house and specializes in small, one- or two-piece custom jobs. Most customers belong to either the tool and die industry or the paper and cardboard industry. Holzem is responsible for purchasing, machining and sales.

"Even though I run the company, I am still a machinist at heart," Holzem said. "As such, I'm on the floor every day."

Needing to write a business plan that would address expansion and a potential move, and having no formal business training, Holzem went in search of a business incubator. Instead, he found the Chippewa County Economic Development (CCED), which in turn referred him to the SBDC of UW-Eau Claire. There, he began a working relationship in 2013 with consultants Dave Kochendorfer and Luke Kempen, who were "easy to work with," according to Holzem.

After completing his business plan, Holzem continued to work with Kochendorfer for business advice, for financial projections and to secure loans through a local bank and the Regional Business Fund.

HOLZEM MACHINE

Accomplishments with the SBDC of UW-Eau Claire:

- Developed business plan
- Secured several loans
- Created financial projections
- Purchased new machine
- Expanded and moved facility

"Working with (the SBDC) was a total game changer. (They) really helped me figure out how to get my business where I wanted it to be."

- Ben Holzem

Some funds were used to build a much larger workshop in Bloomer, Wis., that was completed in July 2015; the reason for the move was to be more centralized and closer to his customer base. Other funds were used to purchase a new machine (an HAAS VF-5 50 taper vertical machining center) that increases Holzem Machine's capabilities by doubling the part sizes with which it can work.

"Working with Dave was a total game changer," Holzem said. "He really helped me figure out how to get my business where I wanted it to be."

With the new machine and building, Holzem looks to grow his business to 10 full-time employees (the next full-time employee will be his son upon his graduation) and \$7 million-\$10 million in annual sales. He knows this growth will require 2-3 more pieces of machinery and a possible add-on to his workshop, and Holzem has already declared he will lean on the SBDC when he needs the inevitable help down the road.