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Why I Started a Business in Michigan, and You Should, Too

Hear from a local entrepreneur who is thriving in this Midwest state.

By Rebecca Treon on March 12, 2025



All Dogs Can in Lapeer offers obedience, agility and competitive training.

Anyone can be an entrepreneur. You just need a good idea, the right tools and location, and a resilient mindset. Since you already have the idea and mindset covered, let [Michigan](https://livability.com/mi/) help you with the rest and see how your business thrives. This state boasts an emerging venture capital ecosystem as well as organizations and groups that assist with everything from business plans and funding to market research and employee recruitment.

Entrepreneur Darlene Collings started [All Dogs Can](https://www.alldogscanlapeer.com/), a dog training facility in Lapeer, in 2011. After deciding to take a step back from her medical billing business, she took up the hobby of taking her dogs to agility classes, but they were far from home. Collings took matters into her own hands, initially leasing a building locally for her business. As the business grew, Collings built an 18,000-square-foot arena and training facility.

"I just opened to start doing obedience classes," she says of her business. "I had no idea it would grow from a tiny training center into this gigantic building."

With support from Michigan's small business resources, Collings was able to make her entrepreneurial dreams a reality. Read ahead to learn more about her journey and success.



Cathi Winkles Digital Photography

Darlene Collings, right, started All Dogs Can in 2011.

to get a commercial loan to build our facility. I met the first instructor I hired there, and she's still with me after 14 years. I worked with Harry Blecker at the SBDC. He's a cash flow counselor who helped me get everything ready to take to the bank so I could get a loan. The SBDC is such a great resource, and it offers such great classes online and in person. I also received a couple of small grants, and Harry was awesome with helping me explore those possibilities.

How has your company grown since you started?

I have 14 subcontracted instructors who come in and teach. The turnout has been amazing. The phone just rings off the hook. We have classes from about 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, sometimes with three classes going on at once. We have agility, obedience, all levels and trick classes. We add whatever the public is calling for. With 10 students in each class, our classes are full and have a waitlist. Friday through Sunday, we are rented out for competition agility trials. I also hired a manager because I couldn't keep up with people calling. People come here from all over, and we have taught thousands of dogs.

Tell us about some of your achievements over the years.



Courtesy of Darlene Collings

Darlene Collings received the Michigan SBDC's Best Small Business Award in 2017.

In 2017, I won the Michigan SBDC's Best Small Business Award. There were 12 of us chosen out of more than 5,500 businesses. Harry Blecker nominated me for that. We went to Lansing for a big fancy dinner and awards. I had never done anything like that before, and it was a great honor.

I also convinced the local Holiday Inn Express to take dogs to accommodate the handlers coming in for the competition agility trials. We fill almost two whole floors at the Holiday Inn Express every weekend. People come and eat, buy gas, and we go out on the weekends with club members, so money is coming into the area, thanks to All Dogs Can.

What advice would you give other entrepreneurs?

I have no college education, just the hard knocks of learning and following through with things. If I can't offer a good service, I'm going to lose business. I'd tell people to go for their dreams. Do all the research you can. If one person doesn't help you, don't get discouraged. It's just one person saying they can't help you, so go to another person. You can do it. You just have to follow through on it. I went from my first medical billing business to an 18,000-square-foot dog training facility, and it's just amazing.

Are there state and local incentives available for women-owned businesses?

I got a grant from [Michigan Women Moving Forward < https://miwf.org/>](https://miwf.org/), a community development financial institution that works to expand economic opportunity for women, during COVID, which was really nice and helped with bills before we could get back to work. I recently got a grant from the Economic Development Alliance of St. Clair County. Those have helped me tremendously.

Why would you recommend Michigan to others looking to start a business?

Michigan is a great place to start a business. With all the information and help from the SBDC, it's just wonderful. I can't say enough about them. I've been so lucky to have them support All Dogs Can. Sometimes, I look around and think, "I can't believe it."

This article was sponsored by [Michigan Economic Development Corp. < https://www.michiganbusiness.org/>](https://www.michiganbusiness.org/)



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