

Center shows firms it means business

By [Kristina Shevory](#)

Seattle Times Eastside business reporter

When Pedro de Magalhães Castro, the founder and owner of **Magellan Architects** in Redmond, let a team of students from the University of Washington at Bothell analyze his company for ways he could expand, he thought he was giving them a chance to gain work experience.

The group, working through the Bellevue Entrepreneur Center, took seven weeks to put together a market-research project, which included information on Magellan's competitors and on architectural trends. The students told de Magalhães Castro that he should explore projects in the biotech industry and bid on federal contracts.

"These students opened our minds to things we should have been thinking about — like the biotech industry that surrounds us," said de Magalhães Castro. "You get so busy with your own business that you forget to do your own homework."

The Bellevue Entrepreneur Center — a partnership of higher education, private companies and local government that helps people start or expand small businesses — was founded in May 2002. It provides business counseling, networking and consulting through its teams of students, industry advisers and faculty from the University of Washington, Bothell; City University; and Bellevue Community College.

Last year, the group fielded 1,100 requests for business assistance, a 28.2 percent increase over 2002; counseled 115 businesses, a 62 percent rise; and boosted business training by 13.6 percent to 250 people.

The center helped create 72 jobs and retained 129 positions in Eastside businesses last year, for a total economic impact of \$11.6 million, according to the center's annual report, released Tuesday.

The center wants to help more businesses and has started a \$500,000 micro-lending program to help small companies that either can't get a loan from a bank or don't use banks.

The fund, expected to be backed by a group of Eastside banks, will start giving out loans of \$5,000 to \$35,000 this fall. It has received \$50,000 from Eastside Commercial Bank and wants another \$50,000 before it will start giving loans.

"We need a fund for the Eastside to help grow our economy," said Mike Luiten, president and chief executive officer of Eastside Commercial Bank and treasurer of the entrepreneur center. "The best part about this fund is that money comes from the Eastside and goes back to the Eastside."

The group points to companies like **Magellan Architects** as an example of how it has helped Eastside businesses. **Magellan** is one of nine companies partnered with consulting teams so far this year.

Since the students finished their report for de Magalhães Castro, he has added an employee to his now eight-member firm; completed 70 projects, compared with 114 in all of 2003; and increased sales 20 percent over the same period last year.

"We try to get clients in two years what would ordinarily take them 20 years to learn," said Corey Hansen, a business-development specialist with the center.

For more information, contact the center at 425-564-2888, or visit www.beconline.org.

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