



HOW SMALL BUSINESS OWNER GAIL BROWN BENEFITED FROM THE UNIQUE PRO BONO ADVISING PARTNERSHIP OF KAISER PERMANENTE, JUSTINE PETERSEN, & PACIFIC COMMUNITY VENTURES

When Gail Brown's father, Elisha Brown, started **Brown & Brown Realty** in 1960, he did so with one thing in mind: to help disenfranchised Black homeowners find the housing they needed in the face of racist "redlining" practices across St. Louis. Gail grew up in the business, so when she took over the renamed **Brown-Kortkamp Realty** as owner in 1995, her attitude towards providing equitable options to residential and commercial property owners remained exactly the same. Unfortunately, two once-in-a-lifetime economic crises made it increasingly difficult for Gail to provide her community with the services they need. **Pacific Community Ventures** and the **Small Business Support Circle** are working to change that.

Women, people of color, rural entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurs from economically distressed urban areas create the vibrancy that make up our communities. However, these very entrepreneurs have the least access to quality, free advising networks. To help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the small businesses that make up nearly half of our economy, PCV is bringing together a rapidly growing coalition of companies and organizations invested in the success and resilience of small businesses across the United States. We call this initiative the "**Small Business Support Circle**" (or **SBSC** for short), and it's working to get millions of dollars of free advice into the hands of job-creating small business owners everywhere.



GAIL BROWN
Brown-Kortkamp Realty

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT CIRCLE

IN ACTION

- SINCE 2021:
- 1500+ ENTREPRENEURS SERVED
- 67% ENTREPRENEURS OF COLOR
- 63% WOMEN-IDENTIFYING ENTREPRENEURS
- \$2,500,000+ WORTH OF FREE ADVICE & COACHING

Join our
Small Business Support Circle
to help more small business owners.

Contact **Danielle Moseley**
at dmoseley@pcvmail.org.

www.pacificcommunityventures.org

Through their partnership and generous funding, members of the SBSC are helping PCV to leverage and scale our unique **BusinessAdvising.org** pro bono advising platform to provide small businesses with the support they need to weather these tumultuous times. The SBSC's keystone member, **Kaiser Permanente**, is one such member. Thanks to the generous support of the American integrated managed care consortium, the improved reach and impact of our small business services is manifold. Now, the real-world impact of the SBSC's support for the entrepreneurs who are most neglected by the traditional financial system, government programs, and have the hardest time getting free business advice – women and LGBTQIA+ folx, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, underinvested communities, immigrants and refugees, veterans, justice-impacted people, and disabled and neuro-divergent communities can be traced all the way down to the street level at PCV.



MAKING IT MAKE CENTS

To understand how it works, we begin in the summer of 2020, when Pacific Community Ventures received a conditional grant of up to \$3,000,000.00 from the **Kaiser Permanente National Community Benefit Fund of the East Bay Community Foundation**. This grant supports the scaling of PCV's **Pro Bono Business Advising Program** to reach additional Black small business owners and entrepreneurs of color in building healthy communities, specifically in eight regions of the U.S. served by Kaiser Permanente. PCV has cultivated a national partnership network of peer BIPOC-led organizations that provide support to local small business owners from underinvested communities, including smaller cities and rural areas.

One of them is **Justine Petersen**, a Missouri Not-for-Profit Corporation whose mission is to connect institutional resources with the needs of low-to moderate-income individuals and families. ***"Justine Petersen aims to connect institutional resources with the needs of low-to moderate-income entrepreneurs and their communities, and PCV's Business Advising program offers direct access to knowledgeable professionals who can provide just that,"*** says Shawna Collier, Chief Partnership Officer at Justine Petersen. ***"Alone, we cannot change the world, but by collectively 'Building Assets and Changing Lives,' we can witness progress together."*** Through Justine Petersen, we were introduced to Gail Brown.



OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Today, Brown-Kortkamp Realty primarily manages private residential sales, but they're historically a full-service real estate company that also specializes in commercial: listing and selling both existing and new construction throughout the state of Missouri. With multiple enterprises – including an insurance company that Elisha Brown started – Brown-Kortkamp Realty moved into its current location in 1997, occupying a 32,000 square foot mixed-use office and storage building in St. Louis' central corridor. Due to the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic's resultant economic strife, Gail had flip-flopped for years over whether to further develop the space or sell it and re-invest the funds into a new project. When the building closed its doors for the stay-at-home order, and Brown-Kortkamp lost some of its staff, we introduced Gail to pro bono advisor **Jennifer Levy** – a former Partner at **Rockwood Capital, LLC** and current board member on the **San Francisco-Marin Food Bank**.



Meeting for the first time in June of 2021, Gail and her mentor went through an analysis of the business together. Quickly deducing that it didn't make sense to keep paying overhead for the near-empty property, Jennifer helped Gail make a hard decision: it was time to finally sell the building. Gail admits she didn't go quietly, but Jennifer's outside perspective was important for her to understand just how much she was losing. Between regular mortgage payments, insurance, utility, and maintenance costs –plus the back-rent owed from storage tenants– being too emotionally attached to the space was bleeding Gail's business dry \$6,000.00 per month. Jennifer explained that she'd needed to tackle its sale if she really wanted to pivot the business as she had done so many times before.

Though she's based in California, Jennifer got active researching and identifying the right commercial broker for the property. Once on the market last Fall, Gail quickly found a potential buyer. And though the sale ultimately fell through in the due diligence process last December, the search –and Jennifer's tutelage– remains strong. As they seek out the right buyer, Jennifer continues to meet with Gail and use her CPA experience to assess long-term financial goals for Brown-Kortkamp Realty. Making the decision to go fully remote and close out her storage leases is now helping Gail recoup \$1,500.00 in overhead each month. And she says that the headspace this partnership gives her is invaluable. Gail explains that what she appreciates the most about the partnership is the "accountability" that Jennifer places on her to achieve her own goals. "When you're at the top, you don't have anyone to bounce ideas off of," she also explains. "For entrepreneurs – especially leaders who run their own business– to have someone to speak to with an outside perspective is very helpful."

It's no small wonder that things are finally progressing for Gail. The impact of services provided by and for members of the SBSC make a significant difference: in a recent multi-city pilot with a partner small business accelerator, small business owners matched with a PCV advisor were nearly twice as likely to create jobs and had 14% higher average revenue growth than those without. Moreover, 86% of all SBOs matched with a PCV advisor last year reported that working with an advisor had helped their business.

If you're reading this and your company or organization isn't yet a member, **we need you**. [Join our Small Business Support Circle](#) to help more small business owners. Contact **Danielle Moseley** at dmoseley@pcvmail.org.