

SUCCESS STORY

BISMARCK 2022



LITTLE ODESSA

BISMARCK - Originally from Moldova, an Eastern European country, Mirabela Punga has created and is living her American dream in Bismarck. Mirabela and her husband, Sergiu, moved to North Dakota in 2012, and to Bismarck in January, 2019.

It was June 2021, when Mirabela realized she wanted to open her own business. She really wanted to bring a taste of Europe to the Bismarck community. Mirabela and Sergiu opened Little Odessa, an Eastern European grocery store, in October, 2021. Coming from Moldova, Mirabela wanted to have access to the traditional

food she was used to. She also said, "I wanted to help the little community of Europeans in Bismarck and make them feel a little closer to home. I also wanted to make North Dakota more attractive for people to establish here." That is exactly what Mirabela has done.

Thus far, the community of Bismarck has been extremely supportive of Little Odessa. They have provided Mirabela with very good feedback and have been great at spreading the word of her business. Through her start-up process, she learned that several members of the Bismarck

community have decedents that originally came from the Odessa area. Mirabela realized that many of these community members are excited and happy to taste what their grandparents used to eat. She said the business has been growing well so far.

"We are planning to start making borsht soups and sell them in the store for take-out this winter," she added. "Borsht is a Ukrainian beet-based red soup with cabbage, carrots, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, and meat. It has become the most popular






opening of her business.

“The ND SBDC was my starting point and was a big help with me creating my business plan.” Through the services of the ND SBDC, Mirabela was able to create a professional business plan that helped her secure funding from a local lender, allowing her to open Little Odessa.

Mirabela would recommend the ND SBDC services to other small business owners or aspiring entrepreneurs. “The ND SBDC has a professional team that knows what they are doing. Use the resources offered to help you succeed.”



about our small business has been a challenge.” She also shared, that encouraging community members to try new foods has been a bit of another challenge in itself.

In order to make Mirabela’s American dream a reality she reached out to the ND SBDC Center in Bismarck, which she first found out about through a Google search. She shared, “I needed help. I wasn’t born in this country and wasn’t sure how the system worked.” Before starting her advising sessions, she was hoping to get answers to her questions and find support in the

Eastern European dish.” Mirabela shared her secret to a tasty borscht, “Don’t throw in all the vegetables you have in the house, just the ones mentioned.”

Mirabela is excited about being a business owner. She stated, “I get to meet new people and have the interaction I want. I am a people-oriented person.” However, opening a new business comes with many challenges. For Mirabela and Little Odessa, that has been visibility. “Raising awareness in the community



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