

# Deb Hansen Wins Western Oklahoma "Dream Big" Contest

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Deb Hanson (second from left) of the Sweetness Factory in Weatherford is the winner of this year's \$5,000 Dream Big Western Oklahoma competition. Other finalists included (from left): SWOSU CEBD staff and host Lisa Thiessen; Kathryn Halleen and Kurt Kramer, Yankee Farms in Elk City; Andy Barrett, Many Hands Art Space in Watonga; and Cheryl McCullers, Rent My Vintage in Clinton. The finalists each won \$500 awards.

Deb Hanson of the Sweetness Factory in Weatherford is the winner of this year's \$5,000 Dream Big Western Oklahoma competition that recently ended with a "live pitch" and awards luncheon held on the Southwestern Oklahoma State University campus in Weatherford.

Twenty-one contestants entered the online competition that is intended to celebrate the spirit of entrepreneurship in Oklahoma, and four finalists were selected to participate in the live pitch. Hanson won the top prize to launch her dream, which is to grow her mail-order business through an e-commerce website. The Sweetness Factory pays their bills and gives profits to the Regional Oklahoma Food Bank's Food for Kids program.

Other finalists who participated in the event and received \$500 grants were Cheryl McCullers of Rent My Vintage in Clinton; Andy Barrett of Many Hands Art Space in Watonga; and Kathryn Halleen of Yankee Farms in Elk City.

Dream Big Oklahoma is an entrepreneurial ideas contest for start-up entrepreneurs and existing business owners to win cash to start or grow an Oklahoma business. To participate, entrepreneurs and existing business owners simply upload their 'dreams' during a regional contest administered by their local economic development corporation, in this case the SWOSU Center for Economic and Business Development (CEBD). The participants then encourage friends, customers and other business owners to vote for them. Winners then qualify for the statewide pitch-off in Oklahoma City.

A long list of regional sponsors collaborated to provide this contest and cash award for Dream Big Western Oklahoma. In addition to the SWOSU CEBD, regional sponsors included the Chickasha Economic Development Council, Western Oklahoma Human Resources, First National Bank & Trust of Chickasha, Public Service Company of Oklahoma, Kiwash Electric Cooperative, Weatherford Area Economic Development Foundation and Anadarko Economic Development Authority.