

## Green building systems manufacturer secures USDA grant

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Roald Gundersen and Amelia Baxter, owners of [Whole Trees Architecture & Structures](#) [1] in Stoddard, Wis., know firsthand the value of tapping into the network of assistance available to Wisconsin innovators. In 2011 [Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network](#) [2] (WEN) Director Cheryl Vickroy mentored the Whole Trees team to a first place win in the national Cleantech Open. WEN, like the [Wisconsin Small Business Development Center Network](#) [3], is managed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Most recently, Cheryl's assistance played a critical role in securing a recommendation by the USDA for a \$360,000 Phase II Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) award.

"Cheryl did a great job in assisting us and honing our commercialization plan," says Amelia. "She also did a superb job of editing the larger text of the grant and directing our attention toward things we needed to improve before submitting it."

WEN Regional Director Pat Dillon helped Amelia and Roald secure the initial Phase I USDA award to advance their green building systems, which use abundant forest waste as a competitive option to steel and concrete.

"Phase I confirmed that branch portions of round timber are indeed stronger than any man-made connection piece and extremely structurally sound for bracing of buildings," Amelia says. "So, with the confirmation of those tests in the field and in the lab, we are now able to do more testing and bring the design value we developed into commercial systems that we can sell to the industry."

She says the grant will sustain three managerial positions in the company while adding several part-time positions over the next two years.

"It does sustain the R&D portion of our company," she adds. "And it allows us some new avenues of funding around this same research, building us toward bigger things."

Assistance from the [UW-La Crosse Small Business Development Center](#) [4] (SBDC) helped Whole Trees early in their formation to identify funding sources and loan programs. The SBDC also provided business management assistance as the company grew. Referring to that assistance, Amelia says, "The La Crosse SBDC Director, Anne Hlavacka, really pinpointed us as an innovative solution with national and international potential, probably before others in our region did."

Whole Trees continues to raise its first round of private equity and is on schedule with revenue commitments to receive \$1 million in sales in 2012.

### **For information please contact us at:**

Toll-free Wisconsin Business AnswerLine: 1-800-940-7232

E-mail via online form at: <https://secure.wisconsinsbdc.org/busanswer/> [5]

### **Links:**

[1] <http://www.wholetreesarchitecture.com/>

[2] <http://www.wenportal.org/index.htm>

[3] <http://www.wisconsinsbdc.org/sbdc.htm>

[4] <http://www.wisconsinsbdc.org/SBDC/Offices/UW-LaCrosseSBDC.htm>

[5] <https://secure.wisconsinsbdc.org/busanswer/>

