


11-14-2016

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Recommended Citation

Rodrigues, Jill and Roger Williams University School of Law, "Newsroom: Guiding Startups Through Legal Pickles 11-14-2016" (2016). *Life of the Law School (1993-)*. 576.
https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life/576

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Newsroom

November 14, 2016

Guiding Startups through Legal Pickles

Among the first clients of RWU Law's Business Start-up Clinic, Fox Point Pickling entered the marketplace with the help of trained business law students.



PROVIDENCE, R.I. – It started as just a hobby for Zared “Ziggy” Goldfarb, transforming a fridge full of farmer’s market produce into pickled medleys of cucumbers and hot peppers, sauerkraut or *kimchi*.

He’d gift the stuff to friends and family. At his wedding, the table centerpieces featured jumbo jars of pickles for guests to snack on throughout the celebration. His wedding party favors? Homemade pickles and jams, of course.

But when he was laid off from his longtime career in public relations and marketing, Goldfarb started to consider tuning his avocation into a business.

“No one in southern New England was making gourmet pickles on a large scale, so I decided to look into it more,” according to the culinary artist, who tested his first recipes inside his apartment in the Fox Point neighborhood of Providence. “I love cooking – it’s my time to decompress.”

With original gourmet pickle concoctions ready to be developed for the market – but zero experience at starting a business – Goldfarb enlisted the expertise of **RWU Law’s Business Start-up Clinic** in 2014 to guide him through launching his burgeoning endeavor. At the same time, he collaborated with [Hope & Main](#), a culinary business incubator in Warren, R.I., to rent a commercial kitchen to craft his product.

At the **Business Start-up Clinic** – now located inside the University’s [new Providence Campus](#) – Goldfarb worked closely with a pair of law students certified by the [U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#).

Before the first pickles were jarred and ready to ship, Goldfarb had already trademarked his brand name ([Fox Point Pickling Company](#)), logo and slogan (“Small state. Big flavor.”) and worked to protect his trade-secret recipes, thanks to the free legal services he received at the Business Start-up Clinic. It’s an important step for any new business owner or entrepreneur who is just starting out, according to **Clinic Director Katie Ahern**.



“Most new business owners face an overwhelming number of legal issues when they first start out, and for many those issues are the most challenging and foreign,” **says Ahern**, who noted that Roger Williams’s Business Start-up Clinic is one of only 42 university programs to be certified to conduct intellectual property work via the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. “We help entrepreneurs protect their brand by determining if a brand name is available, sometimes suggesting how to make a name stronger or a more protectable brand long-term, and we do the trademark and trade-secrets filings for them.”

Intellectual property isn’t all they do, either. Student clinicians also advise clients on entity formation (like deciding between a limited liability corporation or sole proprietorship) and nonprofit compliance, as well as draft contracts. As an 8-credit course, students spend the majority of their time working with clients, but they also take their knowledge out into the local community with targeted industry presentations for food services or entrepreneurs considering nonprofit status.

“I can truly say I learned more in this clinic than all of my classes combined, because I was applying what I had learned,” **says Megan Hertel, a third-year law student** who will take the Advanced Business Start-up Clinic course in the fall. “It’s one thing to learn something in the abstract; it’s much better to apply what you’re learning and see how it works in the real world. You are able to work with a client and see that knowledge come full circle.”

For Hertel – who served two clients during the spring semester, drafting business agreements and advising on entity choice for a travel company as well as navigating a path toward nonprofit compliance for an education-based charity – the experience illuminated her career path following graduation. “Not only was it an opportunity to work with real clients on real business matters, I was able to learn how to do it the right way, under the guidance of a professor – that process is an unparalleled learning experience.”

From tech entrepreneurs to nonprofits and retail businesses with national and international ambitions, law students have assisted a wide range of startup businesses since the clinic opened its doors in 2013. Among the clinic’s success stories, Fox Point Pickling Company proved to be as satisfying and tasty as it gets. In just over a year, Goldfarb’s pickles have made it onto shelves in grocery stores, gourmet food shops and more throughout New England, parts of the West Coast and as far as Bermuda.

And that wouldn’t have been possible, Goldfarb says, without help from the Business Start-up Clinic.

“The students pointed me in the right direction and walked me through all the steps,” says the owner and self-proclaimed ‘head pickleteer.’ “As a startup business, I couldn’t afford to hire a lawyer and get counsel. Without their help, I would have spent much more time looking into these legal issues than be able to spend time on growing a business.”

By Jill Rodrigues RWU '05