

Lynn start-up forum means business

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item | Posted: Thursday, February 26, 2015 3:00 am

LYNN — Bosolakhana “Bo” Thach loved running her Lewis Street convenience store, defending it with her life in 2011 against a knife-wielding robber, and only selling it in 2012 after her mother became ill.

The West Lynn resident is back in the market for a new store, and she said next Tuesday’s City Hall business start-up forum is an important stepping stone along the way to reaching her goal.

The 6 p.m. seminar in Veterans Memorial Auditorium is open to everyone, but Councilor at large Hong Net hopes its will attract local Asian-American entrepreneurs working to open new businesses.

“I feel there are so many people who want to open a business but they don’t have the resources. The goal is to talk about how the city can help,” Net said.

Thach’s former Arnold’s Bakery Outlet store wasn’t just a place to work — it was her way of life.

“I always wanted to be independent. I made my career choice around my family,” she said.

Thach’s 16-year-old daughter, Rachana Chau, grew up in Arnold’s, playing “under the counter” after school and during summers. During the 10 years she ran the store, Thach got to know residents living on side streets off Lewis Street.

“I love people. There is no better place than in a retail store to talk to people,” she said.

Thach brings business experience to Tuesday’s seminar, and she suggested city officials provide examples of how the city is pro-business and outline the step-by-step process involved in obtaining required permits.

Economic Development and Industrial Corporation representatives and Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy’s aides are assisting Net in organizing the seminar.

“Councilor Net asked the mayor’s office and EDIC to assist on a community project to inform folks on various loan programs we offer,” said EDIC Executive Director James Cowdell.

Net wants to follow up the seminar by finding a way for the city to hire a “trilingual business liaison”



Arnold's Bakery Outlet

Bosolakhana “Bo” Thach's old Lewis Street convenience store.

assigned to reach out to residents who want to start businesses. He said the liaison could also visit existing businesses to find out if they are flourishing or facing obstacles to growth.

“It would be someone who can walk the streets and meet business owners and get feedback on why businesses are not doing well so we can see where improvements are needed,” Net said.

He wants the liaison to be fluent in English, Spanish and Khmer — the Cambodian language spoken by some of the 6,300 residents of Asian descent estimated by the U.S. Census to be living in Lynn.

Cowdell said EDIC provided \$275,000 in business start-up loans last year to four firms, with the money helping to employ 26 people and keep 15 others employed.

Cowdell said Tuesday’s information session will parallel one held with the Latino Business Association last year for Spanish-speaking residents interested in starting businesses.

“We’re hoping for equal success next Tuesday,” he said.

Thach hopes to open a new store in six months and said finding a good location is a key element in her search. She has already met with EDIC staff in their City Hall office and praised them for giving her advice on business networking and other tips.

A Cambodian native, Thach moved to the United States in 1988, settling in Lynn in 1996. Her husband, Dan Chau, is an 11-year GE River Works employee.

The 2011 robbery attempt when she repelled the would-be thief with a length of iron reinforcement bar did nothing to lessen her love for running a business.

“For me to be out there in a store, I feel like I am helping people. I got to know everyone in the neighborhood by their first name,” she said.

Arnold’s customers filled a handmade sign with their signatures in 2012 when Thach and her husband made the choice to care for her ailing mother in their home. Bunyn Chiv died in 2013. Thach does not regret her decision to sell, but she is anxious to get back behind a cash register.

“I loved having a business in Lynn. People respect and tolerate one another,” she said.