

[By Nina Keck](#)

Congressman Peter Welch hopes a partnership that's been helping Vermont National Guard members with their small business needs can become a model for the nation.

It's hard enough to start or run a small business. But to do it while you're deployed in the military can be truly daunting.

Back in 2008, Vermont's Small Business Development Center won a \$300,000 grant to work directly with the Vermont National Guard to help veterans with their small business needs.

Because of the program's success, Welch is working to expand the partnership nationwide.

"The biggest challenge we have is to help our veterans get back into the community," Welch said. "They have very high unemployment rates. It's a tough economy. Practical things we can do, we should do."

Those things include having an adviser who understands the demands of both the military and a small business. That's where Chris Herriman comes in. She provides free business counseling to veterans as part of Vermont's Small Business Development Center.

As the wife of National Guard soldier and a small business owner, she says she understands better than most the business challenges facing veterans.

Michele McCollum agrees. She and her husband Tim worked with Herriman while Tim was still deployed in Afghanistan to start a new property management business in Killington.

"The help and the guidance that was provided to us through the SPCD was phenomenal," McCollum said. "Any time that I felt like I can't do this anymore, I called Chris Herriman and she lifted me up and she made me believe that we can move forward and we can be a success.

The cooperative program has helped veterans and their families start more than 50 businesses in Vermont, in addition to helping families who already own their own businesses manage it while the soldiers are away.

Small business adviser Chris Herriman says the McCollums are a great example of what's possible. Their new business is already expanding.