



## SBDC Success Story

# Dolphin Swim Academy

Brittany Ballweg teaches kids to be confident, strong swimmers

A self-described “pool rat,” Brittany Ballweg spent her formative years as a competitive swimmer, starting at age 8. When an injury sidelined her at 16, she began coaching at her local swim club.

“It was awesome, and I loved it,” she says. “By the time I was 18, I was teaching swim lessons, and I worked there during summers and breaks, lifeguarding, teaching swim lessons, and working in the front office.”

She graduated from college in Green Bay with a degree in business and management and returned to the swim club to be the aquatics director. She continued to love her job and knew that eventually, she wanted to own her own swim school. She left the facility in 2015 to work for another local swim school, owned by her swim coach.

“I told him, ‘I’m with you until I have the capital to start my own,’” Ballweg says. “A year later, I gave

my two weeks’ notice.”

That was in March 2017. Two months later, Ballweg launched her private swim lesson business, teaching private lessons at high schools and in clients’ backyards.

“Wisconsin’s outdoor swim season is so short, I knew if this was going to be my career, I’d need to find a rental facility,” Ballweg says.

By August 2017, Ballweg had secured a lifeguard position at an assisted living complex and expanded her role to teach private lessons at the complex’s pool, which she rented. Things went swimmingly until March 13, 2020, “when my dream came to a screeching halt,” says Ballweg, as a result of COVID lockdowns.

Fortunately, Ballweg had already gotten the ball rolling on opening her own facility and had met with contractors in November 2019. While her plan had been to keep teaching lessons at the assisted

living facility pool and begin growing in her new location, “2020 threw us all for a loop,” she says. “I made a 180 turn on everything I started. For example, my pool was supposed to be in DeForest, and now it’s in Cottage Grove.”

Ballweg’s confidence and good humor helps her work through challenges. As a 33-year-old woman, she surrounds herself with people who respect her and connects with new colleagues using her signature warmth.

“I’ve been in this industry over 15 years, and my husband works in pool filtration and servicing, so people don’t question me on pool de-



sign,” she says. “My contractors are swimmers, and they’re great.”

When Ballweg first set out to start her own business, her motivation was being her own boss, but as she has taught, she has realized that she has a unique ability to help children feel comfortable in the water and fall in love with swimming. She has worked with multiple swimmers who have had near-drowning experiences or severe anxiety about getting in the water.

To help move her dream along, Ballweg took advantage of the Wisconsin Small Business Development Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Wisconsin School of Business (SBDC)’s consulting services, working with SBDC Business Consultant Amy Bruner Zimmerman.

Ballweg’s first meeting with Zimmerman took place in the summer of 2020. The COVID pandemic was ongoing, and Ballweg was looking for new options for a bank loan after a difficult first attempt. She ended up calling twelve bankers and signing with Chris Cox at Bank of Sun Prairie. Her multi-million dollar loan was approved in three months and closed in four months.

“Amy has been amazing,” Ballweg says. “She helped me get



insight into the banker’s mind. I made the phone calls, but she was there as a sounding board and my cheerleader.”

Ballweg’s reason for starting her business is personal, and her business plan and numbers, with Zimmerman’s encouragement, reflects that. Zimmerman worked with Ballweg to understand the business’s cash flow, balance statements, and other “not-so-fun financials”.

“She was everything, even helping me plan my week,” says Ballweg. “On one phone call, I said, it’s been so hard, I literally just need to plan the next seven days, and she helped me set an achievable goal, when I couldn’t see the end in sight.”

Now, Dolphin Swim Academy’s building is completed, and Ballweg is taking registrations for

lessons at the new facility. The pool can accommodate up to twelve teachers at a time. Ballweg says it will be an exciting learning curve to grow her staff from two to twelve.

“That also means we need a person on deck and at customer service,” Ballweg says. “When there’s twelve teachers in the water, there’s fourteen or fifteen workers on deck. I’m excited to go to work as the owner and teach and see everyone.”

To learn more about this success story, visit [sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/success-stories/](https://sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/success-stories/)

The UW-Madison Small Business Development Center supports businesses in Dane, Sauk, and Columbia Counties.

