

West Valley takes off

Discover how this fast-growing region benefits from ASU's small business support and programs that prepare students for in-demand jobs

By Lisa Robbins, ASU News
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Story by Amanda Loudin

West Valley-based functional drink maker Sly had a problem. The company had successfully broken into the crowded beverage market and was gaining traction with retail partners. Getting to the next level of growth, however, was proving difficult, as Sly struggled to meet the fulfillment demands of potential new customers. Looking for a solution, Sly reached out to ASU's newly created SMB (small and medium-sized businesses) Lab, located on the [West Valley campus](#), for help.

The brainchild of Dr. Amy and Dr. Tom Czyz, '92 BS in political science, who have been local optometrists for over 25 years in the Valley, Sly represents the first line of circadian beverages. The functional drinks contain natural energizers and relaxers aimed at aligning the sleep-wake cycle.

While the Czyzes were onto the right idea with their drink when they created it in 2019, they needed the expertise of the [SMB Lab](#) to help them brainstorm the right next steps.

The SMB Lab aims to help local businesses solve their biggest problems. Its target partners are businesses with revenues ranging from less than \$15 million, classified as "small," and \$15 million to \$500 million, classified as "medium," looking for help with their biggest problems.

"We recognized that after the pandemic, many small businesses were struggling," says Hitendra Chaturvedi, professor of practice in ASU's National Association of State Procurement Officials [Department of Supply Chain Management](#). "We have so many assets at ASU and decided that maybe we could help them."

For Sly, the SMB Lab collaboration led to the identification of a solution: The company needed to take on its own manufacturing to grow and meet demand.

"ASU created the platform for us to connect with business leaders at the Small Business Administration, and today, we're identifying the right space for manufacturing operations," Amy says.

All that effort eventually paid off, with the drink launching nationwide at nearly 500 Sprouts Farmers Markets locations starting in July 2026. That effort is also supported by new distribution partnerships with KeHE — one the country's largest natural food distributors — and Arizona's largest food distributor, Shamrock Foods.

Sly's story reflects a broader pattern of opportunity emerging from the West Valley campus. As the region grows, ASU is meeting its needs in a variety of manners — from small business assistance to supply chain expertise, unique approaches to engineering and integrated sports program support.

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Devising solutions that lead to growth

When businesses sit down to work with the SMB Lab's students and faculty, they focus on the key buckets of cost reduction, revenue enhancement and raising funds, according to Chaturvedi.

“The value proposition is fantastic,” he says.

To date, 45 companies have been helped in 17 different labs, along with nearly 420 students, and 100 faculty members, providing more than \$20 million in value to these companies at no cost. Five West Valley communities, including Peoria, Avondale, Goodyear, Glendale and Phoenix, have participated.

“We're getting a good deal of traction and now have the cities coming to us asking for customized labs,” says Chaturvedi. “Even Phoenix's city manager has asked for help and plans to visit.”

The sweet spot for partner companies is between \$1 million to \$25 million, according to Chaturvedi, many of which are veteran-, minority- or women-owned businesses, not to mention a good deal of alumni-run ventures, like Sly's.

“We have 50 alumni involved in our business,” says Tom, “and our goal is to help students with support, mentorship and eventually, jobs.”

Gopalakrishnan Mohan, senior associate and dean of faculty and director of the [School of Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#) within the [W. P. Carey School of Business](#), views it as a pillar connecting to the West Valley community.

“We provide research and insights, networking, collaboration and experiential learning for our students,” he says. “As the data comes in, we’re also building a strong database of problems and solutions. If we collect enough data, one day we may become a tool that can greatly benefit society.”

Mohan sees a future where many of the lab’s students eventually take over local small businesses as their owners age and retire.

“We’re seeing students who are taking interest in buying a business and scaling it, and that’s exciting because they will bring new mindsets to managing,” he says. “The impacts of the lab will be far-reaching in the coming decades.”

Preparing tomorrow’s workforce for the West Valley’s needs

Complementing and collaborating with the SMB Lab is the new [School of Integrated Engineering](#), which welcomed its first class of students in 2024. Students in this school can earn a BS in engineering science (business) or a BS in engineering science (microelectronics). The West Valley is a hub for technology startups and innovation, so the school is a perfect partner for workplace and economic development.

“Problems rarely sit within a single domain, so you have to work across disciplines and communities, which is where our programs come in,” says Shawn Jordan, interim director of the school. “We work across the West Valley campus ecosystem to produce graduates with the skills needed in the West Valley.”

One example of this is the microelectronics degree track, which was created specifically to support the region’s rapidly growing semiconductor industry.

“We merged parts of an undergraduate electrical engineering degree most relevant to the semiconductor industry with additional industry practice-focused and advanced content,” says Jordan. “The faculty includes a professor of practice who spent 25 years at Intel, and then we have a teaching professor with a semiconductor background.”

While the programs are still young, the integrated engineering students are already gaining experiential learning from local companies like Banner Health, Intel, TSMC and Southwest Airlines, and this summer, many are participating in internships in the West Valley.

They are also integrated into the SMB Lab.

“Several of the problems local businesses have are technology-related,” says Jordan. “Our junior-level engineering science (business) students are working with SMB teams to help design AI-based solutions for these companies.”

Mastering the supply chain

All businesses depend on the supply chain, but many struggle with their supply chain management. In the West Valley, that’s where ASU’s new [Master of Science in supply chain management](#) degree comes into play. Supported by the W. P. Carey School of Business, the

program provides students with the skills they need to optimize supply chain operations.

It's a perfect complement to the West Valley, says Brett Duarte, clinical associate professor in the NASPO Department of Supply Chain Management.

"The West Valley is a huge logistics and warehousing corridor. We're a proponent of experiential learning and we've partnered with several companies to give our students that opportunity."

Ivy Chan, '25 MS in supply chain management, is a good example of this. While at ASU, Chan visited a local company, meeting the CEO and learning how the company worked. There, she discovered that supply chain management often involves working with incomplete or imperfect data, creating a challenge for professionals. Chan also took advantage of related case competitions, industry speaker events and business clubs — something she encourages future students to try, too.

The West Valley is also home to numerous health care companies, affording the master's students a host of learning opportunities.

"We built a strong partnership with HonorHealth, collecting data and helping them optimize their inventory in multiple locations across the Valley," Duarte says.

Students have also completed capstone projects — similar to internships — with a variety of West Valley businesses, often leading to full-time work upon graduation. Grocery chain Albertson's, Microsoft, DSV and MornstAir Inc. are examples of this symbiotic relationship. And when the SMB Lab has a problem where the supply chain management students can help, they become part of that team, too.

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Prepping students to help the West Valley's growing athlete population

Athletes like ASU alumni Cam Skattebo, '24 BA, Jon Rahm, '16 BA, Phil Mickelson, '92 BA and Briann January, '10 BA, have all been open about the fact that their prowess is more than physical — it also includes a mental edge. To get it, they've all turned to sports psychologists, whether to solve a problem or hone their "mental toughness" against the competition.

Now thanks to ASU West Valley's new [Master of Science in psychology with a concentration in sport psychology](#), the West Valley's vast network of athletes and sports teams can perfect their mental game, too.

Serving as a bridge between psychology and kinesiology, the new program — which features small class sizes — allows for close mentorship between faculty and students. Many of the students have a shared history of athletic participation, and they bring a passion for all aspects of sport to the classroom and out into the field.

"We're able to leverage our interdisciplinary programs to meet the needs of the sports community," says Todd Sandrin, vice provost at ASU West Valley and dean of the [New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences](#).

Some of the sport psychology students have had hands-on practice with the ASU Women's Club Rugby team, and Sandrin says the goal is to eventually "be on speed dial" for the West Valley. The first cohort of students began in fall of 2025, so they're just beginning to get that foothold, but ASU is exploring ways to establish West Valley partnerships, according to Heather Smith-Cannoy, director of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

"Faculty are working to engage with the local community to advise and disseminate best practices for parents of young athletes, to advise and support development of youth sports programs, and to help with coaching in youth sports," says Lindsey Mean, associate professor in the [School of Social and Behavioral Sciences](#). "We believe students graduating will bring valued knowledge and practices to benefit a variety of sports-related and community contexts."

It's all part of ASU's move to establish a "sports nexus" in the region, which brings together sports psychology, sports management and eventually, sports journalism. That's important as the West Valley continues to grow as a sports mecca, hosting Super Bowls, NCAA Final Four championships and more.

"Just southwest of here, we have State Farm Stadium, and for baseball, we're the spring training capital," Sandrin says.

The 2025 spring training season generated an estimated \$764 million in economic impact for Arizona alone, according to a study by the W. P. Carey School of Business.

ASU's campus is uniquely poised to support and grow the West Valley's bright future.

"It's not just about the West Valley community — it's about us being of that community," Sandrin says.

Author bio

A journalist, Amanda Loudin's work has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Harvard Medicine and other national media outlets.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Photo of ASU's West Valley campus by Sabira Madady.

Text image(s)



Sly founder Amy Czyz (far left) engages with students and faculty during an SMB Lab event on ASU's West Valley campus to gain insight to better operate her business. Photo by Prarthan Patel



Ivy Chan, '25 MS, seen here at the Knight-Swift Logistics Lab, part of W. P. Carey at West Valley campus, gained hands-on experience with companies in the West Valley. Photo by Shelley Valdez



Ashley Rodarte (right), a second-year sport psychology student, coaches ASU women's club rugby player Riko Takayoshi, a fourth-year global management student. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News