



VOICE

America's Small Business Resource

FROM THE DESK OF THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Spring has always been one of my favorite seasons. The weather becomes more temperate. The daylight hours grow. The trees and plants begin to bloom in an array of splendid colors and scents. There is truly a unique energy that is present during this time of year. It is a time of beginning, renewal, and activity.



Terri L. Denison

The spring theme is present in the small business. After the holidays and the slower pace of winter, many individuals decide that this is the year they will pursue their dream of starting a business. Existing business owners commit to taking their enterprise to the next level—entering a new market, increasing their production capacity, moving their operations from home to a separate facility, looking to stop leasing space and to purchase a building. There is an increase in inquiries regarding SBA programs and those seeking counseling and training. We see SBA lending activity begin to increase as well.

Spring fever comes to the SBA Georgia District Office as well. Our outreach activities around the state begin to pick up. From our Community Express Loan Program workshops, to our various District Office training activities for lenders and small businesses, to participating in other events geared towards small businesses and resource providers, we find our calendars becoming fuller and our being out on the road more frequently. It is also a wonderful time to explore new opportunities where we might better serve Georgia's small businesses.

I look forward to all the possibilities that this season brings. I hope that you do too!

SBA is Part of New 5-City Entrepreneurial Partnership

After a formal kickoff late last year, Atlanta's Urban Entrepreneurship Center is in full operation with the support of partners that include the Atlanta Urban League, the SBA Georgia District Office, and the Georgia Small Business Development Centers.

"The SBA is pleased to be part of an integrated, metro-wide partnership that links minority entrepreneurs to service providers throughout the city," said Terri Denison, SBA Georgia District Director.

Atlanta is one of five cities that are supporting these Centers as part of an Urban Entrepreneur Partnership (UEP). Other Centers are located in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Jacksonville and Kansas City.

The UEP has a technology-based management system that keeps track of clients that work with UEP partners, noted Lucy Holifield, Director of the Atlanta Center.

"We can efficiently follow-up on clients to assure that they get the help they need," said Holifield.

In helping announce the Center, Mayor Shirley Franklin said the facility at 100 Edgewood Avenue will provide technical and management counseling and access to financing, including SBA-based small business loans.

More details on the Center are available online at

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SBA News Items

2006 Small Business Awards

The SBA Georgia Small Business Awards Luncheon will be held on April 20th at the Ansley Golf Club. Please call 404/331-0100, ext. 215 for reservations. Small Business Week activities in Washington, D.C. will be April 12-13 during National Small Business Week. Four major awards will be presented during the two-day conference including the National Small Business Person of the Year and a tribute to small businesses recovering from natural disasters.

SBA Resource Guide Online

You can view the SBA's 2006 Georgia Resource Guide online at www.sbaguides.com. The new 51-page guide has both an English and Spanish section with a list of SBA lenders, resource partners and various small business development offices.

Free Training and Seminars Center

The SBA Georgia District Office has a free Training and Seminars Subscription Center where you can register for information to be sent to you by email or fax on upcoming training, seminars and other SBA programs. The registration page is www.sba.gov/idc/groups/public/documents/ga_atlanta/ga_subscription.html. Complete the information in the boxes from the link above and click on "Subscribe."



Hays Receives SCORE Award

The Atlanta SCORE Chapter has been awarded a \$1,000 grant from the SCORE Foundation for its innovative minority recruitment initiative. Leonard Hays, at left, headed up the diversity program for the Atlanta Chapter and is shown receiving a special award from Tom Clark, Chairman of the Atlanta SCORE Chapter.

SBA: Making a Difference in the Gulf Coast

By Region IV Administrator Nuby Fowler



It has been just over six months since the Gulf Coast was devastated by the most unprecedented natural disaster in recent American history. For many survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, life will never be the same: homes, jobs, pets, and family members lost. The experts have calculated the recovery cost will be in the trillions. But as we all know, some things simply cannot be replaced.

America's response to this catastrophe has been equally unprecedented. From almost every sector of this country, be it public, private or governmental, Americans have opened their hearts and committed the resources to support the region as it rebuilds. Certainly no one should expect that recovery to happen overnight; the truth is we are making progress. SBA's role in disaster recovery is to assist individuals, non profits, and businesses rebuild their homes and places of business so that they can put their lives back in order and their employees back to work. I am proud to say that we are doing just that.

SBA has organized the largest workforce effort in the agency's history to process gulf coast recovery loans. Over 4,000 professionals have been enlisted to process disaster loan applications, and they have done great work. We have already set a record for the largest volume of loans approved for any disaster. In addition, our district offices, which are typically focused entirely on business development, have been brought in to support the effort and are processing applications as well.

Recent press accounts have brought into question the speed with which SBA is handling disaster loan applications. The truth is SBA disaster loans have always been intended primarily for long-term rebuilding and reconstruction of damaged home and businesses. The thousands of homeowners and businesses who are successfully rebuilding their lives and getting their businesses back in operation, thanks to SBA, are proof of the work we are doing. Every week I hear the remarkable stories of businesses that, through hard work and a little help from SBA, have already turned this catastrophe around and are helping their local economies rebuild by selling their goods and services and by creating and retaining jobs. SBA's responsibility to the victims of these storms is real and so is our commitment to doing whatever it takes to help these individuals and their communities get back to business.

ELF Wood Products Uses 7(a) Loans to Expand

Michael Falkenhagen and his family partners got their first SBA 7(a) Loan in 2001 which allowed their company, ELF Wood Products Inc., to move from leased quarters to a 25,000 square-foot plant purchased in the Fulton Industrial area.

The company would experience strong growth at its first plant in the design and manufacture of wooden display units and fixtures for convenience stores and other retail outlets. However, by early 2005, the company had out grown its facility and was forced to lease other space to accommodate its growing operations.

Falkenhagen turned to Mike Sherman at Cornerstone Bank for financing to buy a larger plant. In March of last year, Cornerstone Bank provided a \$1 million 7(a) Loan for ELF Wood Products to buy a 60,000



Worker puts Plastic Edges on Shelving

square-foot plant.

“As a manufacturer, you are viewed and perceived by your customers with the equipment and space you have at your plant,” says Falkenhagen, Company President. “Our SBA loan brought our company to a higher level,” he added. “Our plant-equipment is now at a capacity

that allows us to compete nationally.”

Falkenhagen, in fact, credits his latest SBA loan with helping his company land a new contract with a major furniture retailer in the Southeast. Other customers include Race Trac Petroleum, and Velux sky lights. Their fixtures are used at Wal-Mart, Office-Depot and Lowe’s.

Even though the company has reached annual sales of \$3 million, it wasn’t that easy when Falkenhagen, his brother Robert, and former wife June started their company 17 years ago in Michael’s home basement.

The company never got paid after delivering products to its first customer. Fortunately, that customer introduced them to a key person at Georgia Pacific Corporation who gave them enough business to help firmly establish the company, said Falkenhagen.

SBA Joins Atlanta Urban League In New Entrepreneur Partnership

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www.atlantaeec.com or by phone at 404/591-8006.

Speaking at City Hall, Franklin said the UEP project has received a \$2.3 million grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation of Kansas City.

Emphasis at the Center will be on identifying firms that have the highest growth potential and the greatest impact in terms of job creation, said Marc Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League.

The program will also include a Minority-Owned Franchising Program to target minority-owned franchise businesses located in low-income communities.

A “Business LINC” initiative will also encourage large firms to work with locally-owned smaller firms by providing business advice, networking, etc.

Other officials who helped launch the local Urban Entrepreneur Partnership include Dr. Clinton Dye Jr., President & CEO of the Atlanta Urban League; Allan Adams, Interim State Director of the University of Georgia SBDC; Eugene Merriday, Executive director



MAYOR FRANKLIN WELCOMES UEP TO TCITY

of the Economic Development Corporation of Fulton County; Jonathan Jefferson, Dean of the Clark Atlanta University School of Business; Art Brown, Marketing Director of the Georgia Tech Electronic Commerce Resource Center and Miguel Alandete, Vice President of Georgia Small Business Capital.



SBA Business Development Specialist Jorge Valentin-Stone is conducting a Spanish Language Orientation Seminar each month at the downtown SBA Georgia office. The next seminar will be from 2-4 p.m. on March 9th. Another is set for April 13th. Pictured at the February seminar were, from left: Yulys and Miguel Viscaya, Jorge Hernandez Tabuada, Jorge Valentin-Stone, and Juan Carlos Lopez.

SBA Hurricane Loan Approvals Reach \$6 Billion for Victims

The U.S. Small Business Administration has approved a record \$6 billion in low-interest, taxpayer-backed disaster loans to homeowners, renters and businesses affected by last year's devastating Gulf Coast hurricanes.

To date, more than 86,200 hurricane victims have been approved for SBA disaster loans. Of those, more than 70,100 disaster loans have been approved to homeowners totaling \$4.6 billion and more than 16,100 have been approved to businesses for more than \$1.4 billion.

"This has been the largest disaster response in the SBA's 52-year history and we continue to work with urgency to help those who have turned to the SBA for assistance," said SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto. "We have thousands of disaster assistance staff working with the people and the communities of Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama and Florida on this response."

Overall, the SBA has conducted damage inspections on 95 percent of the damaged properties and has processed 87 percent of the total disaster loans for businesses. And more than 276,400 disaster applications have been processed.

Community Express Loan Workshops Continue into Spring

A workshop will be held in Columbus on April 12 from 6-8 p.m. at the Columbus Chamber of Commerce to provide information on Community Express Loans. This is a program of the U.S. Small Business Administration that offers loans of \$5,000 to \$50,000 to small business startups and expansions. The free event is a continuation of a series of SBA workshops on the pilot loan program that started early this year in Macon, Savannah, Valdosta and Atlanta.

Loan applications will be taken on site by Business Loan Express (BLX) an SBA Preferred Lender. The workshop is hosted by the Columbus Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Other participants in the workshop include volunteer counselors with the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) and Business Loan Express. Both SCORE and the SBDC are technical assistance providers to borrowers under the program. The Columbus workshop will be in Saunders Board Room at the Chamber, located at 1200 Sixth Avenue in downtown Columbus.

Other Community Express Loan Workshops are scheduled at Kennesaw State University on May 3, and Carrollton on May 10. To register online, click on "What's New" at www.sba.gov/ga.

The Community Express Loan Program is a pilot program designed by the SBA and the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC). The Community Express Loan Program requires no collateral and no business plan, but credit history may be part of the application process.

The program is offered to geographic areas serving mostly Low and Moderate Income areas and minority, women and veteran-owned small businesses. You can pre-register by email at tammi.brown@sba.gov or by phone to Ms. Brown at 404/331-0100, ext. 605.

Regulatory Fairness Hearing Set for March 23rd

Small business owners can voice concerns about federal regulatory compliance issues during a hearing in Jacksonville, Florida on March 23. The hearing will be conducted by the SBA's Regulatory Fairness Board for Region IV.

Small business owners may testify by registering in advance. Call Annette Paulson at (904) 443-1914 at the SBA North Florida Office or send an email to annette.paulson@sba.gov. Testimony may be submitted in writing in advance or at the hearing.

The hearing will be at the SBA North Florida Office at 7825 Baymeadows Way, Suite 100B, Jacksonville, Florida 32256. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and the hearing will run until noon.