

U.S. Small Business Administration



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Ted Dennard, President of The Savannah Bee Company Inc. Is Georgia's 2007 Small Business Person of the Year *--Company Products are Sold Coast-to-Coast--*

Ted Dennard, whose Savannah Bee Company is projected to reach \$2 million in sales this year, has been selected the 2007 Small Business of the Year in Georgia by the U.S. Small Business Administration.



Dennard, with over 21 years of experience in beekeeping, has grown his company from a home-based business to a national brand in only seven years.

Dennard will receive the statewide award from Terri L. Denison, SBA Georgia District Director, later this spring at an Atlanta luncheon hosted by the Georgia Lenders Quality Circle. He was nominated for his SBA award by the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center in Savannah.

When he started his company, Dennard was the only employee. Today, the business has 16 employees, a web site at www.savannahbee.com, and operates out of a 6,000 square-foot warehouse in Savannah. His fast-growing brand of honey and related products is sold at such specialty stores as Williams-Sonoma, Nieman-Marcus and The Limited Company outlets.

The product line at Savannah Bee Company has continued to expand and includes a popular honey-based lip balm among its cosmetic line. In 2005, Dennard signed a contract with The Limited Company to co-develop and market a line of natural beehive-based products. These products are now sold in the company's 1,550 "Bath & Body Works" stores throughout the country.

About a year after the business was established, demand for its products was pushing sales at Savannah Bee Company almost through the roof. In 2004 and 2005, annual sales reached over the \$500,000 mark and climbed to over \$800,000 during 2006. Last year, sales made another jump to \$1.4 million, with revenues expected to top \$2 million during 2007.

In 2003, Dennard began to feel that his operations were getting out of hand so he turned for help to the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center in Savannah. The assistance from the SBDC has been on-going over the last couple of years.

“All of a sudden we went from doing business with 16 stores to over 100 in one year,” he recalled. “It was just too much. I had no real business savvy, no experience in running the nuts and bolts of a business.”

Dennard started working with Lynn Vos, the SBDC Area Director, on his company’s accounting including systems to improve his cash flow projections and other financial analyses. “She made me look at things I was trying to ignore,” he said. “She made me ask the hard questions and look at my company from a realistic, business-numbers point of view.”

With the push for natural foods and their health benefits, public reception to the products of Savannah Bee Company has been remarkable. His Tupelo honey was featured in Oprah Winfrey’s “O” Magazine in January 2005. Last year, “O” Magazine praised the company’s Blackberry Honey Hand Soap in its October issue. “We put a bottle in the office kitchen and now the whole magazine is abuzz,” it declared.

Other national coverage of Dennard and his company has come recently from The Ladies Home Journal, Vogue, Real Simple, Inc. Magazine, and the CBS-TV Early Show.

Dennard first got hooked on bees when he was befriended by an old beekeeper who was allowed to keep some hives on his family’s property in Glynn County, just south of Savannah. The experienced beekeeper started showing the young Dennard the secrets of beekeeping, and bees & honey have been a major part of his life ever since.

When he was a student at Sewanee University, in rural middle Tennessee, Dennard lived in a cabin that he rented from a retired priest who, it turned out, was an avid beekeeper. Their friendship over several years gave Dennard even more knowledge about the art and science of beekeeping.

Tupelo honey has been the heart of Savannah Bee Company from the start. At first, Dennard sold this honey, grown mostly in south Georgia and northern Florida, in squatty jars with hand-painted labels. Later, he had the marketing savvy to begin packaging his honey in French style wine bottles, changing it from a basic commodity into a high-value product.

Although the company takes up most of Dennard’s time, he finds a way to help his community. After graduating from college, he spent two years teaching beekeeping in Jamaica as a volunteer for the Peace Corps. He has made presentations at the Bethesda Home for Boys where he showed the children there the art of beekeeping and the important role bees play in our daily lives. He also gives programs on beekeeping to local schools and at the City of Savannah’s summer leisure series.

Dennard is married to the former Carolyn Jenkins of Montgomery. They have three children.

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