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Arvin's Appliance and Furniture Rebuilds in Wellston

ST. LOUIS - On Jan. 1, 2003, Arvin Walker-Bey re-opened a furniture and appliance store in Wellston. Within two weeks, the store had recorded \$27,000 in sales and completed ten deliveries from its 14,000-square foot showroom and catalog center. "Our goal for the year is to reach \$300,000 in sales. With the level of success we've achieved since January 1, I am confident we'll be on target," says Walker-Bey.

Arvin's Appliance and Furniture is one of several small businesses that have received valuable technical and financial assistance from the Greater St. Louis Regional Empowerment Zone in partnership with the St. Louis Regional Office of the Missouri Small Business Development Center.

The Empowerment Zone has provided a low interest loan that will be used for equipment, inventory and working capital necessary to re-open the retail business following a fire in 2001. Technical assistance provided by the SBDC supported the company's loan package and application for funding. Together, the resources of the EZ and SBDC have made it possible for Arvin's to re-open.

Walker-Bey, a trained appliance repair technician, started his business in the basement of his sister's home repairing appliances. In 1990, the volume of business increased at the same time that a small space in Wellston became available next to antique dealer. He took the leap and soon expanded into the antique and auction market when customers wanted to buy things that were not available. As his skills grew, so did the number and profile of his customer base. He instituted direct mail campaigns and advertising on television and in local newspapers. Business boomed.

In 2001, lightning struck the store. Fire severely damaged the building and its contents. To support his family, Walker-Bey took a job at Rothman furniture, staying involved in the industry and with his customer base. But the Mayor of Wellston, William Harvey, introduced him to the Empowerment Zone as a representative to the Community Council from Wellston. "Arvin had provided a necessary business service to the people of Wellston, North County and the City of St. Louis. He was the best representative of both the business community and grass roots citizens we could have from Wellston."

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