



Veronica Stephenson purchased a digital sewing machine with her business

TYNISA TRAPPS

## Entrepreneurs kick-start business with DHL grants

BY TYNISA TRAPPS

Veronica Stephenson knew what she needed to enhance her business when she first spotted the digital sewing machine. The only question was how to afford it.

Then, the North Miami resident found out about Miami-based Micro-Business USA, a nonprofit organization that provides training and loans to small business owners and low-income individuals throughout South Florida. After completing the initial eight-week seminars and training sessions, Stephenson was eligible for a \$1,000 business grant sponsored by Plantation-based DHL. Chosen as a recipient, she was able to purchase the \$850 machine, which helped launch her home-based line of women's textiles.

"There are a lot of things I can do now, such as embroidery," Stephenson said. "It also allows me to customize each piece [of clothing] and get more orders out."

DHL's Business Development Partnership program, which began in South Florida last year, enables selected micro-business owners who participate in the Micro-Business program assistance with launching their businesses. Micro-business owners are considered those who operate a business on little funds with a small customer base, typically out of private homes.

In many cases, the owners have difficulty obtaining financial assistance from a bank or lending company because they lack long-term established credit and enough collateral. According to a study conducted by the Aspen Institute Field Program, close to 10.8 million micro-business entrepreneurs have applied to banks for financing and been rejected. This is DHL's second-year participat-

For more information on the Business Development Partnership or Micro-Business USA, contact Miktoia Fordham at (305) 438-1407, ext. 204, via e-mail at [toria@microbusinessusa.org](mailto:toria@microbusinessusa.org) or visit the Web site at [www.microbusinessusa.org](http://www.microbusinessusa.org).

ing in the program with its local partner, Micro-Business USA. So far, DHL has given away \$60,000 to 30 grant recipients in six different metropolitan areas.

Miktoia Fordham, executive director of Micro-Business USA, said Micro-Business students who wish to apply for the grants must show a need to ship products and sign a statement that they plan to send items out within the next 90 days.

Kelly Keogh, DHL's director of corporate citizenship, said the program not only gives micro-business owners financing, but also allows DHL to develop and diversify its customer base. In addition to the cash, each of the recipients receive 10 prepaid DHL ShipReady shipping products with no pick-up or delivery fees.

"Typically, we give to nonprofits or charities, but this way we get to work hand in hand with small business customers that are important to our business and offer them our knowledge," Keogh said.

### A push over the top

Derrick Miller, one of last year's 10 South Florida grant winners, said the money was the catalyst that allowed him to kick-start his business as the U.S. distributor for

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