



A Regional Growth Corporation

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## McCreary Businessman Buys Pizza Franchise With SKED Micro-Loan

WHITLEY CITY, KY - Cecil Blankenship is passionate about making McCreary County, Ky. a better place to live, work and eat.

The 45-year-old small business owner and Desert Storm veteran says he's been around the world twice but his heart has never left Southeast Kentucky and Northeast Tennessee where his parents and grandparents grew up and made their living in the retail business.



McCreary County resident and small business owner Cecil Blankenship is putting his food service expertise to work for himself at Domino's Pizza.

From ports as north as the North Pole to the sunny beaches of Hawaii, the 13-year

Navy veteran got a taste of what the rest of the world has to offer early in life. Today, Blankenship is ready to settle down and have a family in the only place he's ever truly called home.

When the opportunity to purchase a Domino's Pizza franchise came Blankenship's way in 2008 he saw it as the perfect opportunity to give back to the area he loves and make a living do it.

Blankenship received his chef and food service training in the military. Preparing meals for everyone from first-class personnel to admirals, he learned a thing or two about good service, good food and great persistence.

He's putting all of that experience to work for him in this his first entrepreneurial effort.

But being an entrepreneur is a challenging task and getting a business started in one of the nation's poorest counties takes twice the courage.

Had Blankenship not taken over the ownership of the business, it would have closed, he said. With his father, Milton Blankenship, Sr. and his wife, Amy, as moral support, he set out to find ways to make his dream happen and buy the franchise.

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“I just couldn’t let it close,” he said. This county needs this business.”

The search to finance his dream led him to Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED). SKED partnered with Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation (KHIC) to purchase the franchise and get the business on its feet using its Micro-Loan Fund.

“Cecil Blankenship comes from a long line of small business owners,” said Michael Bush, SKED director of lending. “His willingness to work as an onsite, owner-manager makes me feel confident the business will be a successful one. SKED is happy to be a part of making that happen.”

Serving as owner-manager gives Blankenship a better grasp of what’s being done and where the business is going. While he prefers to work on the inside, he has been known to deliver pizzas too.

Giving fellow McCreary residents a job is part of Blankenship’s dream. He updates his employee training frequently so all workers receive as much corporate training as needed. He’s pledged to create eight new jobs as part of the business startup and is on his way to meeting that number.

Dominos is one of three restaurants in McCreary County who serve pizza as their primary entrée. Dominos is the only one who delivers.

“We do have the best pizza in town,” he said with a smile. “I’ll put my pizza up against anyone’s.”

SKED’s Micro Loan Fund is designed to enhance long-term job growth by providing technical assistance to local entrepreneurs and short-term asset financing to small and emerging businesses in rural areas which need assistance in purchasing equipment in Southeast Kentucky.

The maximum loan amount is the lesser of 90% of the total project cost or up to \$35,000. The minimum loan size is \$5,000. A minimum of 10% owners’ equity must be provided directly from the business.

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*SKED is a nonprofit economic development organization formed by Congressman Hal Rogers in 1986 to create jobs in a 42-county service area in Southern and Eastern Kentucky. It accomplishes this mission by recruiting new businesses, making direct loans, offering small business technical assistance and providing community/economic development services to local communities. For more information about SKED, visit: [www.southeastkentucky.com](http://www.southeastkentucky.com).*