



A Regional Growth Corporation

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SKED Awarded USDA Grant to Assist Laurel Businessman in Scoring Some of His Fiscal Goals

LONDON, KY - When Jeff Sheppard played basketball for the University of Kentucky, Atlanta Hawks and on the U.S. Olympic team, his philosophy was simple: learn everything he could about the sport, his competitors' strengths and weaknesses and prepare himself physically to compete against them on the court. Years later, the Georgia native is applying similar skills to build a small business in Southeast Kentucky and he's scoring some major goals.

Sheppard got his feet wet working for a private label apparel company in Louisville, Ky. in 2002. In 2005, he began taking steps to develop his own business. Sheppard took a giant leap into the small business world in 2006 when he signed papers to separate himself from the larger corporation and go it on his own. In 2007, Sheppard established 15inc his own private label apparel company.

The young father has used the skills he acquired earning his bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Kentucky overseeing sales, customer service and management of the company located in Laurel County, Ky.

Along the way, Sheppard has learned from his competitors' successes and failures, along with a few of his own, as to just how he can apply his own unique expertise to the business and become more competitive, profitable and productive.

Part of that learning curve has involved honing his fiscal skills. And he's added some skillful team members to ensure his success.

Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation (KHIC) and Cumberland Valley National Bank financed the purchase of 2.3 acres of land in one of the region's most rapidly developing industrial parks and assisted Sheppard in building a 5,000-square-foot facility in the Laurel County Industrial Park.



Jeff Sheppard has made a name for himself in the sports world, now he's concentrating on scoring big in the small business world. Sheppard owns 15inc in Laurel County.

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Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED) was called on to use its below-market-rate revolving loan funds to purchase the equipment needed to produce the products for 15inc : screen printing equipment, warehouse racking equipment, a fork lift and necessary office equipment in 2006.

The new facility was completed in April 2007. But Sheppard's goal of making the business autonomous was still out of reach. Relying on similar businesses to help fulfill contracts was keeping the business from becoming more productive and profitable.

Sheppard knew he needed more working capital to fulfill his current contract needs and acquire more. He would need to buy more equipment, hire more professionals and build and customize his inventory. He returned to SKED for assistance. SKED staff determined the project was a perfect fit for a USDA, Rural Development, Rural Business Cooperative Service grant designed to assist small business owners in Southeast Kentucky. SKED applied for and was awarded a \$165,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) to then loan to 15inc to assist in the expansion of his business.

This expansion has resulted in the retention of five jobs and the addition of three more full-time positions in Laurel County, where the current unemployment rate tops 10.3 percent.

The 15inc signature series line of apparel is a high end line of corporate and athletic apparel sold directly to customers a competitive price. In 2005, 15inc introduced the first private label golf shirt. Over the past three years, its golf shirt has become its signature product. 15inc produces products for the University of Kentucky, Kentucky Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Marine Corps and others

When 15inc opened its doors in 2007, it had two full-time employees. Today, the company has 8 full-time employees and is working at full capacity to produce custom screen printing and embroidery. The additions of an eight-head embroidery machine and manual and automatic screen printing press have enabled Sheppard to keep all contract work in house.

The SKED loan has allowed 15inc to become more efficient, increase quality control over production and bookkeeping and to become more profitable.

SKED Director of Lending Michael Bush has worked with Sheppard over the course of his business' development and expansion the past three years.

"Jeff knows what he wants to do with the company and where he wants to take it and that makes the whole process flow more easily," Bush said. "Jeff is well on his way to building a successful business. It's been a pleasure working with him and his staff."

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Sheppard encourages anyone with the dream of owning their own business should pursue it, but build some partnerships along the way to reach their goals.

“There’s a great network of resources out there ... like SKED, if you look for them,” he said. “I’ve networked and gotten some knowledge and gained the experience I need, made some mistakes and learned from them. I’m finally at a time where I can make this move and make it myself. That feels good.”

His success in the small business world has not deterred Sheppard from his community service goals. He continues to work with the non-profit organization Operation UNITE to conduct basketball camps and speak to thousands of young people each year encouraging them to say no to drugs and yes to their futures.

For more information about 15inc, visit: www.15inc.com.

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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.