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SMARTS Graduates Gather for Reunite Somerset

Somerset, Ky. – Graduates of SKED’s small business training program - Entrepreneurial SMARTS – gathered at the Center for Rural Development, recently, for a reunion that is designed to give them the opportunity to share their successes and network with other small business owners in the region.

Sean and Suzie Thompson, owners of Knife of the Party Catering Co., attended Reunite Somerset bringing with them free desserts they had prepared as part of their new McCreary County catering business. The husband and wife team graduated from the August 2014 SMARTS class in Whitley City.

More than a year since graduation, the couple says the information they received as part of the training course gave them the motivation they needed to get their business started and the financial savvy to do it in the smartest way possible.

“I graduated from the University of Tennessee Culinary Arts program in 2008 and wanted to do something like this back then, but the pieces didn’t fall in to place until we took the SMARTS class,” Sean Thompson said. “The class put us in touch with so many important people who’ve helped us along the way: John Preston with the ECU Small Business Development Center and Glen Hall, (district manager for the Office of Field Operations at the Corbin Taxpayer Service Center.)”

The Thompsons opened their business in March 2015. Operating out of the basement of their home has worked out well for these parents of young twins. They’ve marketed their business in a number of ways in McCreary and Pulaski County. They’ve participated in the local Farmer’s Market, provided free samples at McCreary businesses and just recently catered their first wedding in Pulaski County.

When asked just how valuable the small business training course is to them, the Thompsons agreed that the \$25 cost per person was a great investment in their business and their futures. “The truth is,” Suzie added, “if we had had \$2,500 at the time we would have paid that for everything we learned and gained from Entrepreneurial SMARTS.”

Entrepreneurial SMARTS is a \$250 value that’s offered at a cost of \$25 per person, thanks to funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).

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The Thompsons were among three dozen graduates who gathered, alongside small business owners from across the region, to participate in a small business pitch competition at the event and enter to win an iPad. Suzie Thompson was the lucky winner of the iPad.

Amanda Kelly, SKED small business training specialist, conducts the training and organized SMARTS Reunite Somerset. She says this reunion was a success, and she enjoyed meeting many of the graduates from classes held before she came to work for SKED.

“I love hearing their success stories,” she said of the SMARTS graduates. “I believe they are an inspiration to others thinking of doing the same. This was a fun and informative event that, I hope, has left attendees inspired to work even harder to see their small business dreams come true.”

Sponsors of Reunite Somerset included: First Southern National Bank, Station 211, Monticello Bank and Hometown bank. Door prizes were donated by PR Hair Designs and Flying Olive ~ Bluegrass.

A second Reunite will be scheduled in the eastern portion of SKED’s service region in 2016.

Entrepreneurial SMARTS is a four-session, 12-hour course designed to provide entrepreneurs with the knowledge and resource materials they need to get a new small business off the ground. This training also provides owners of existing small businesses the skills they need to become more successful and grow their businesses.

To date, a total of 437 aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners have completed entrepreneurial SMARTS training in 35 sessions held across the 45 counties in SKED’s service area.

SKED conducts the entrepreneurial and small business training program - Entrepreneurial SMARTS: Simple Methods And Reality-based Training for Success – which is based on a nationally recognized training program called Core Four® Business Planning Course. The ARC has provided funding support for these training sessions. Kelly is a certified Core Four® Business Planning Course instructor

At Entrepreneurial SMARTS training sessions, entrepreneurs and small business owners are instructed in how to create a business plan including basic knowledge about starting, financing and operating a business and planning for success. Class participants are also given the tools needed to determine if business ownership is for them.

Existing small business owners receive the support they need to advance the growth of their business and operate a solid, reliable investment. Upon successful completion of this training, participants receive a certificate recognizing their achievements and are eligible to apply for business startup or expansion funding from SKED’s loan funds.

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This nationally recognized course is valued at \$250 per student. However, due to financial support through a grant from the ARC, combined with financial support from SKED, participants pay a mere \$25 per person. In addition, each participant receives a valuable Core Four® Business Planning Course manual and numerous resource materials.

For information about entrepreneurship training, contact Kelly at (606) 416-2008 or by email at akelly@centertech.com. For more information or to register for SMARTS training in your area visit www.southeastkentucky.com. Click on the Training link.

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Formed 29 years ago by Fifth District Congressman Hal Rogers to create jobs in Southeast Kentucky, the economic development organization, based in Somerset, serves a 45-county region in Kentucky. Staff works with business owners, small and large, throughout its service area to identify financing solutions to fund their location, expansion and working capital needs.



Suzie and Sean Thompson are pictured at Reunite Somerset. For more information about their business, visit their Facebook page: www.facebook.com/knifeofthepartycatering