

SMALL BUSINESS

Micro-entrepreneurs get \$1,000 grants

Ten local small-business people each received a \$1,000 grant through a partnership between DHL and Micro-Business USA.

BY JIM WYSS
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Veronica Stephenson expects things to smell a little sweeter around her apartment this week after she received a \$1,000 grant to keep her home-based lotion, textile and scented-soap business growing.

The Miami resident is one of 10 local micro-entrepreneurs receiving the \$1,000 grants as part of a partnership between logistics giant DHL and Micro-Business USA, an affiliate of the Association for Enterprise Opportunity.

At a ceremony last week honoring the first five grant



GRANT RECIPIENTS

- **Adphilnat Studio**, Miami — Manufactures scented-soaps, lotions and textiles.
- **Cameleon Candle**, Aventura — Distributes specialty candles.
- **The Eclectic Connection**, Homestead — An eBay retailer of antiques and knickknacks.
- **Empresariousoa.com**, Kendall — a Spanish-language website offering small business courses.
- **Ready Way Distributors**, Miami — Distributor of cosmetics, vitamins and herbal supplements.

recipients, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Barbara Carey-Shuler called entrepreneurs South Florida's economic engine and asked corporate America to do more to support them.

"The constant number of [small business] failures is

high because we do not give them the attention, help and resources they need," she said.

DHL said the grants are part of a \$30,000 campaign focusing on small businesses in Florida, Texas and Arizona. The program also includes in-kind product contributions and hands-on training for micro-entrepreneurs.

"DHL recognizes how important start-up capital and access to appropriate resources are in nurturing the growth of small business," the company's director of corporate citizenship, Kelly Keogh, said in a statement. "These awards will help give grant recipients the jump-start they need to establish themselves."

A LARGE PRESENCE

A micro-enterprise has fewer than five employees and requires less than \$35,000 in start-up capital. While accurate data about the number of such businesses is hard to come by, one study reports that 90 percent of all establishments in Broward and Miami-Dade counties have fewer than 20 employees. Stephenson, also a full-time teacher at Florida International Academy, works alone at her 1-year-old company called Adphilnat Studio.

The Jamaica native said she's using the grant money to buy a sewing machine to put embroidered trim on the handmade batik shawls she makes.

"I studied textile design in college and got into teaching kind of by accident," she said. "But I've always wanted to design. That was my dream."

Although she hasn't had



AL DIAZ/HERALD STAFF

SOAP OPERATION: Veronica Stephenson has received a \$1,000 grant. Here, she shows a bar of soap and wears a shawl that she has made.

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much time for marketing, Stephenson said she has managed to sell a few dozen bars of soap and about a half a dozen shawls every month.

MORE CANDIDATES

Micro-Business USA is reviewing a second batch of applications to choose the next five recipients.

And while new entries aren't being considered for this grant, the organization's president, Miltoria Fordham, said she hopes to reach similar deals with eBay and Hewlett-Packard.

Micro-Business USA also

helps entrepreneurs access smaller loans.

After attending a series of training seminars, existing businesses can apply for loans between \$5,000 to \$35,000, and start-ups can apply for non-collateralized loans of between \$500 and \$3,000, she said.

Founded 12 years ago, Micro-Business USA has provided training to about 6,000 aspiring entrepreneurs and has helped some 2,700 get microloans, Fordham said.

"I always say we're one of the best-kept secrets," she said.