



News Release

WEST VIRGINIA DISTRICT

Release Date: January 21, 2015
Release Number: 15-13PR

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Gurkees Sandals utilizes resources and funding from the U.S. Small Business Administration

MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA – You may never believe that sandals, handmade in Morgantown West Virginia, are gracing the pages of Vogue magazine in Japan, but they are! And the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) had a hand in making it possible.



Handmade in West Virginia and enjoyed in eleven countries across the world, Vogue Magazine Japan highlights the comfortable yet fashionable sandal.

Gurkees Sandals are known for their rope sandals that are comfortable, fashionable, and artistic. The small business was established in 1984. Ray Sickles, the product’s largest distributor, decided to “buy his job” in 2009, so he could continue selling a product that he believed in.



Gurkees Sandals

To get started, Sickles turned to the SBA and secured a line of credit under the Recovery Act Loan to purchase the supplies he needed to take on owning his own business.

After owning the business for a while, Sickles came across a few challenges in obtaining the rope needed to manufacture the sandals. After attending a financing workshop held by Sharon Stratton, a business coach for West Virginia’s Small Business Development Center (SBDC), an SBA resource partner, Sickles realized the answer to his problem was to purchase his own rope machine to improve product delivery to customers by reducing or eliminating having to wait for rope suppliers and delivery of raw materials to make the sandals.

Stratton connected Sickles with Tim James from First Microloan of West Virginia, a SBA intermediary offering microloans up to \$50,000 to small businesses. Through SBA's microloan program, businesses also receive business-based training and technical assistance to help them successfully start or grow their business. In June of 2013, Gurkees Sandals was able to purchase the machine that would change the way they do business. The company now had the ability to be creative with their product. By using yarn to make rope, Sickles has been able to expand his product line to add additional rope colors to make tie-dye, camouflage, and twisted collections.



Sharon Stratton, SBDC Business Coach; Ray Sickles, Owner; Karen Friel, SBA District Director; Tim James, First Microloan of West Virginia Loan Officer stand in front of the 3,000 pound machine purchased with funds from the microloan program.

The small business employs six to 14 sandal artists depending on the season and exports to 11 countries. In addition to sandals, the business creates belts, key chains, bracelets, and pet leashes.

Sickles states, "The loan we received through the microloan program has allowed us to remain in business." "It is great to see a small business in West Virginia use the resources we have available at the SBA and succeed, especially in the exporting industry," states SBA's West Virginia District Director.

The U.S. Small Business Administration helps small businesses start, grow, and succeed. For more information on the programs and services available through the agency, visit www.sba.gov.

OF NOTE: For more information or one-on-one interviews, contact Nikki Bowmar, SBA's West Virginia Public Affairs Specialist (nikki.bowmar@sba.gov)

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