

# SBA Resource Partner Provides Early Support to Green-Economically-Sustainable Company Based in Morgantown

*SustainU gets start in incubator space with SBDC Coach*



*Karen Friel, SBA WVDO District Director; Chris Yura, SustainU CEO; Sharon Stratton, SBDC Business Coach*

You may not expect a green-economically-sustainable t-shirt company to be based in Morgantown, West Virginia, but that is exactly what you will find! SustainU, located in the heart of Mountaineer Country was founded by Chris Yura in 2009, and employs 23 local residents.

Yura, a Morgantown native, attended Notre Dame College where he played football and received degrees in Sociology and Computer Application. Yura's passion for clothing came from his stint in New York City as a Ford's Model after college. During his modeling career Yura was introduced to the manufacturing side of clothing and knew that is where his career as an entrepreneur was headed.

Yura immersed himself in the industry, taking a six month internship at a clothing manufacturing plant to learn the ins and outs. He returned to Morgantown in the late 2000's, when the economy took a big hit, to open his small business.

"Banks were not lining up at my door to provide funding," laughed Yura. He believed in his dream and so did his parents who took a third mortgage out on their home to help him get started.

Ready to take the next step, Yura reached out to the U.S. Small Business Administration's West Virginia District Office for help and was directed to the WVU Business Incubator and Small Business Development Center's (SBDC) Business Coach, Sharon Stratton. The SBDC is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the SBA.

The WVU incubator, that also housed Stratton's office, was a perfect place for Yura to kick off his company. During his time there Stratton was able to help Yura build and expand his business strategy, plan management for the business, and brainstorm the niche market. After spending a year in the business incubator Yura was ready to move out and take his business to the next level.

"It was great seeing how passionate Chris was about his business," states Stratton. "The incubator provided a safe space for the business to grow, mature, and develop."

Since their time at the WVU Business Incubator, SustainU has grown from \$50,000 in sales the first year to \$1.3 million last year. The company ships to all 50 states and exports to Canada, Australia, and Europe. Their roster of customers reads like a who's who of brand names including Ben & Jerry's, Budweiser, and Ford. SustainU recently was honored to create the official t-shirts for the 2015 College Football Playoff National Championship.

Yura repaid his loan to his parents and the business is now funded by local angel investors who believe in Yura's dream and want to make the vision a reality.

When asked what advice he has for other young entrepreneurs, Yura states, "West Virginia has a great collection of individuals who are willing to share their expertise. I recommend reaching out to the SBA, the SBDC, and prominent business owners and they will give you guidance and advice to make your journey smoother."

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](http://www.sba.gov).

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