



HARMONY HOUSE FOODS

John & Linda Seaman
Greenville
www.harmonyhousefoods.com

“Why try to fudge along when you can get help? Get help from great organizations like the SBTDC.”

John Seaman, a minister for over 20 years, and his wife Linda have four children and decided to share their love by adopting more children. However, this endeavor would require money to support a larger family, especially since two of their children were in college, and the other two would soon leave for college. John and Linda thought of several ways to generate income. One day while planning meals, they came up with the idea to create easy, quick, and healthy soup mixes. This was the beginning of Harmony House Foods, Inc., a manufacturer of premium dehydrated food products.

The couple started the business in their kitchen, but as demand increased, they moved the packaging to their remodeled garage. Linda came up with the idea that would catapult the business to success. She suggested they box up several packages of the dehydrated vegetables and beans to create a Backpacker’s Kit. An avid backpacker purchased one of the kits and sent it to the editor of Backpacker Magazine. The editors were so impressed with the quality of the kit that they awarded Harmony House Foods with the magazine’s 2007 Editor’s Choice Award, a rare occurrence for a food product. The award came as a great surprise to the couple, but they had no idea what it meant for Harmony House. When the editor told them they would soon be drawing interest from such companies as Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI)[®], a major retailer of outdoor gear, they were astounded.

They were excited, but knew they needed to get several things done quickly in order to fill

such large orders. FDA approval, larger manufacturing space, and more employees were needed, and there was little time. John remembered previously meeting an SBTDC employee at East Carolina University during a networking event. With this memory, he contacted the SBTDC office, and was connected with business counselors Mary Elizabeth McNeill and Robbie Dunbar.

When the Seamans told Mary Elizabeth about the REI[®] proposal, she exclaimed, “This REI opportunity is big!” The group went into action to prepare for what was their first large order. Mary Elizabeth helped them with



EASTERN REGION



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marketing, realtor contacts, and connections with commerce departments. Robbie came in to assist with financials, including getting funding for their business, and logistics.

With the help of Mary Elizabeth and Robbie, Harmony House Foods was able to move into their new production facilities in March 2007 – right at their deadline for FDA approval and in time to complete their first order for REI®. They had 300 orders by the time they could get their foot into the door of the business.

“I credit Robbie for not having to use our house as collateral. Robbie’s knowledge helped us find a lender that met our needs.” Originally, the bank felt their business plan’s financial projections seemed farfetched and they were sure the business would not make a profit their first year of full production. But to their surprise Harmony House Foods turned a profit, with sales more than doubling from the previous year, and according to Robbie, they are barely scratching the surface.

Today, Harmony House Foods is enjoying phenomenal success. With outstanding profits and sales that were generated by minimal marketing, they are well on their way to high growth. REI® is one of Harmony House’s major distributors, but they also work closely with other retail outlets, individual customers, and several federal and state prisons. John and Linda credit their success first and foremost to the Lord, but also say, “Why try to fudge along when you can get help? Get help from great organizations like the SBTDC.”

ADVICE

Don’t see the business as a get rich quick thing. See your business as an investment.

Why try to fudge along when you can get help? Get help from great organizations like the SBTDC.

BUSINESS DISASTER RECOVERY

The SBTDC is identified as a first responder for business disaster recovery in the Governor’s North Carolina Disaster Recovery Guide and works closely with the NC Department of Commerce to administer programs ranging from bridge loans, state loans and interest rebates on federal loans. The SBTDC First Responder Team consists of over 15 business counselors who have extensive experience in helping NC businesses recover from disasters such as Hurricanes Floyd and Isabel and the flooding in Western North Carolina due to the multiple hurricanes in 2004.

In the event of a federal or state disaster declaration, this trained team of counselors is prepared to deploy to the hardest hit areas and work with business owners to prepare federal and state disaster loan applications and help determine the business’ ability to recover and become fully operational. Counselors also provide ongoing assistance during the crucial recovery phase.

The SBTDC also works closely with the NC Division of Public Health to increase awareness among NC’s small businesses about the threat of pandemic flu. Pandemic flu poses unique challenges for the business community due to the widespread absenteeism that is anticipated in the event of a severe pandemic. A severe pandemic could result in 30-40% of workers being absent for over 3 weeks at a time due to school closings, illness, and caring for other family members. The SBTDC has prepared checklists and other planning materials and information sources that can help small businesses plan for and mitigate against the economic impacts of pandemic flu.

In these ways, the SBTDC plays a key role in helping North Carolina businesses prepare for and recover from disasters.

