

Focus: Emerging 200 – Showing Entrepreneur Spirit

By James Dowd
December 24, 2008
The Commercial Appeal

Excited over a successful inaugural season that saw 20 local entrepreneurs complete coursework aimed at boosting their businesses, officials with the "[Emerging 200](#)" initiative have renewed the plan for another year in Memphis.

"We can't wait to get started on the second E-200 class in Memphis," said Clint Smith, Small Business Administration district director for Tennessee. "We'll be announcing details soon and expect an even greater response than we had the first time around."

Smith joined other local, state and regional officials at a recent graduation ceremony for this year's participants.

Shelby County Mayor A C Wharton, who delivered the keynote address, called the program a Memphis success story and encouraged participants to use the knowledge they had acquired to improve their surroundings.

"Small businesses are the fiber of our communities and I hope everyone in this program takes what they've learned and uses it to make this a better, more vibrant place to live," Wharton said. "They must be the guiding beacons of our communities and give us all a better sense of place. That's the definition of success."

Developed by the [SBA](#) and launched in Memphis earlier this year, Emerging 200 is designed for small inner-city companies with above-average potential for market growth and increased job opportunities.

Fred Spikner, owner of [Spikner Embroidery & Screen Printing](#), praised the program and looks forward to mentoring future participants.

"I've been in business for 13 years, but this was the first time I ever had a chance to be part of such a great support group and learn from other people like me who are trying to be successful," Spikner said. "I've already increased my revenue because of what I've learned in the program and I'm excited that it's going to be renewed next year. I'm telling everybody I meet that this program is solid. It works."

Ivory Taylor agreed.



Ivory Taylor (right), owner of Taylor Brown Apothecary, seen here with Keith Norman, is a graduate of the Emerging 200 initiative.

"I would encourage people to apply for the program and then be ready to work hard and be open to new possibilities," said Taylor, owner of [Taylor Brown Apothecary](#) and one of this year's graduates. "The big thing is, you can't be afraid to grow. Times are tough now, but you've got to look forward." In 2008, Memphis was one of 10 cities selected to participate -- Oakland, Calif., was also chosen, but later withdrew.

Other participating cities included Albuquerque, N.M.; Atlanta; Baltimore; Boston; Chicago; Des Moines, Iowa; Milwaukee; New Orleans; and Philadelphia.

Next year, the original cities are expected to be renewed and five additional sites will be added.

"One of the reasons that Memphis was chosen from hundreds of cities that applied was because of the support demonstrated by different levels of government here," said Nuby Fowler, SBA regional administrator from Atlanta. "That level of support was instrumental in the program coming here and in it being renewed again for 2009."

E-200 was limited to about 20 companies in each city and admission was competitive. To qualify, firms must have been in business for at least three years, post annual revenues of at least \$400,000 and exhibit potential for growth.

In selecting finalists, the SBA looked at inner cities with employment bases of 40,000 or more jobs. From 1998 to 2005, 50 cities with inner-city job-growth rates of 2 percent or lower were studied -- Memphis posted a 1.6 percent contraction.

According to the SBA, about 80 percent of the economy's net new jobs from 1990 to 2003 were created by businesses with fewer than 20 employees. Between 1995 and 2002, small, inner-city firms contributed nearly three times more new jobs than larger companies.

Emerging 200 provides no direct funding to participants. Instead, business owners and executives focus on applying for grants, creating and strengthening networking channels and developing mentoring partnerships.

"E-200 is vital for small businesses because it makes entrepreneurs aware that they're not alone and that there are resources out there for them," said Dorothy Sinclair, founder of [Brighter Days and Nights](#). "I learned everything from sales and marketing to financing and even how to increase networking opportunities. I'm a different -- and better -- business person because of it."

For more information on E-200, visit sba.gov.

E-200 Participants

A & H Contractors: Thomas Hardiman

AVPOL International: Sandra Walls

Brighter Days and Nights: Dorothy Sinclair

Business Advisors of North America: Jacquelyn Thomas

Compliance Assurance Associates: Arthur Eberle

Corporate IQ: Mike McCune

Downtown Productions: Jodie Vance

General Moving Company: Sidney Montgomery
Minuteman Press: Al Harville
Nu Era Pest Control: Dharrin Collins
Personal Safety First: Kenneth Williamson
SEI/Divine Contracts and Construction: Rebekah Coleman
Spikner Embroidery and Screen Printing: E. Fred Spikner
Superior Building Maintenance: Carlos Franklin
Synergy Technologies Group: Anthony Milton
Taylor Brown Apothecary: Ivory Taylor
Toles Construction: Gregory Toles
United Rubber Die: Danny McKinney
VR-Tech Marketing: Varrie Hamilton, owner
Y & W Technologies: Charles Williamson