

December 2007

MCC Small Business Center's Non-Traditional Advertising Helps Connect Rural Business Owners to Bank Loan



Pictured above are Sharon and Chris Smith, owners of Mackey's Ferry Peanuts.

The Martin Community College (MCC) Small Business Center approaches its mission of connecting rural business owners and entrepreneurs with the information and resources they need for successful growth in a very pragmatic way – through word of mouth marketing and referrals. One such referral led a rural business owner to the Center for assistance in securing a bank loan to relocate its store's operations, gaining greater visibility and space to meet increasing product demand.

In 2003 Sharon and Chris Smith, of Plymouth, NC, purchased Mackey's Ferry Peanuts from a nearby farming couple looking to retire after 20 years of ownership. The business, housed in an old country store off of Highway 64, filled a niche market for handmade arts and crafts and homemade peanut products such as peanut brittle, peanut butter cookies, and roasted peanuts. Supported primarily by nearby customers and "beach traffic" visitors to North Carolina, the Smiths continued store growth by adding to the original list of goods sold and developing a mail-order side of the business. However, with the impending construction of a new four-lane highway to redirect traffic from the existing two-lane road, the store's original location would be bypassed and the Smiths would lose their prized roadside visibility and summer revenue.

After a number of unsuccessful attempts to secure a conventional loan, Sharon and Chris learned about the SBA 504 loan program. Through contacts made while attending past small business seminars, the couple was referred to MCC's Small Business Center. A phone call and an on-site visit later, Georgette Chilton, center director, was able to connect the Smiths to the loan program through Self-Help, a community lender willing to provide the long-term financing they needed.



Once their 504 loan was secured, the rural business owners used the funds to purchase land along the highway's new route and construct a larger building to house their expanding retail shop, office space, and food preparation areas. In addition to modernizing the store's facilities, long-term machinery and equipment were purchased to better facilitate on-site product packaging and shipping for the company's budding on-line catalog business.

Pictured above is the entrance to the new building for Mackey's Ferry Peanuts. To the right is a view from the store's interior, ready for shoppers looking for unique holiday gifts and home decorations.



Martin Community College's Small Business Center continues to attract its clients and seminar participants through the traditional advertising methods of newspaper announcements and flyer distribution. Being based in a rural service area also demands the use of a more personal approach, such as word of mouth marketing and referrals, for sustaining local support. Each recommendation and every display of hands-on assistance, like that given to the Smiths of Mackey's Ferry Peanuts, ensures that the Center's organizational values are being demonstrated and its reputation remains in good standing with the public.

Article written by Lucretia King, MCC Director of Marketing and Public Relations, for print in the *Community College Entrepreneur*, a magazine published quarterly by the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship.