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Denison Development Alliance Grant Accelerates Small Business E-Commerce

DENISON, TX: A high-impact E-commerce Accelerator Incentive Grant Program developed by the Denison Development Alliance (DDA) has awarded 10 grants to help businesses initiate or expand their online marketing and sales, a vital lifeline for shops disrupted by COVID-19.

“Businesses with e-commerce were able to continue some operations while responding to COVID, while those businesses without e-commerce were completely shut down,” said Matt Looney, DDA Chairman. “We had to figure out what we could do as a community to help them become more active online and market resilient. The accelerator program provided new arrows to the business quiver.”

The new program created May 21, inspired by GoDaddy Venture Forward research published in March that concluded “places with more ventures and more highly active ventures experience greater prosperity”, provides \$6,000 for e-commerce marketing projects of \$8,000 or more. The grant has a six-month timeline, aiming to accelerate recipients’ work with consultants to leverage the online market. For companies launching e-commerce, three-fourths of the money goes for preparation, one-fourth for promotion, with ratios reversed for companies who are amplifying their efforts.

The first 10 grant recipients are an eclectic mix of unique local businesses including Monsters on Main, Gifts of Love, Pop Around the Corner, 2 Chicks Home and Market, CJ's Coffee Café,

Sparrows Gallery, Zelda Rose Boutique, The Hangin T, The Desk and Easel and Vintage Mercantile. Each business has developed a unique plan so an array of improvements are underway.

Derrick Roberts, owner of Pop Around the Corner specialty popcorn shop, had just launched online sales when the pandemic closed his store for nearly a month. He received a grant to rebrand and upgrade his website and create an app. “We have a product that not everybody has, so people are willing to order from us online and have it shipped, including international customers,” Roberts said. In April, online sales accounted for two-thirds of the shop’s revenue.

Nitia Musico received a grant to build her first website with e-commerce for Monsters On Main, which is the only store in the country that takes designer fabric remnants and up-cycles them into creative, quirky pillow monsters. “I’m excited that the money has allowed me to do what I’m hoping will be a really good website, really focus on the marketing and spread it around the world,” she said.

“Business owners want to recover from the setbacks, prepare for future unforeseen issues and scale their businesses.” said Melanie Medina, owner of Local Socialight and a consultant who is working with the DDA and several awarded businesses. “What the DDA is doing with these grants encourages them to move forward in recovery from Coronavirus on Main Street and across Denison.”

Wendy Acosta, who recently partnered The Desk and Easel co-working space with national Proximity Space, will use the grant to redesign her website, create a podcast room and revamp her social media. “It’s helping us to focus our planning and giving us some sure footing while we’re headed that direction,” Acosta said. “This is one more way our community is so focused on helping small businesses stay viable.”

“I think this is something every community could be investing in,” said Nate Essin, owner of Undaunted Agency and a consultant who developed an educational webinar with DDA and is working with several businesses receiving grants. “It positions businesses for vertical growth far beyond what they could experience as a local business.”

Due to the strong business response, DDA is beginning to prepare for future rounds of funding. Information about the program can be found at www.denisontx.org/ecommerce.

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