

EDA gets grant for small business export initiative

SUSAN ELLIS

ST. CROIX — The Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority was awarded a federal State Trade and Export Promotion grant of \$332,498 that will be used to help qualifying, small businesses export their products.

"This administration is grateful for the STEP grant award that the territory will receive for a second year. My administration and the VIEDA continue to recognize that our local small businesses can increase their sales and grow their business through export-related

activities. Our unique products and services that reflect our culture can continue to be introduced within the global marketplace through the STEP program and our local small businesses," Gov. John de Jongh Jr. said in a news release.

Last year a similar STEP grant was used to thoroughly evaluate locally-made products with input from agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, United Postal Service, shipping companies, the University of the Virgin Islands and finance and marketing experts, according to Nadine

Marchena Kean, EDA's STEP project coordinator. Twenty business owners learned, among other things, about packing, preserving and labeling their products.

This year's grant will be used for training, marketing and setting up a virtual trade desk for qualifying businesses. Information from the federal government about export requirements will be available on line. Later in the year, Kean said the EDA plans to set up a virtual mall with storefronts that sell "proven products" from the Virgin Islands, like beer, body creams, windows, doors and even

catamarans.

"Not everyone will get into the mall, but it will be the best and brightest," Kean said.

The businesses who participated in last year's program are eligible to apply for this year's program, Kean said, and to qualify, businesses must be at least a year old and profitable with an exportable product or service, have a valid VI business license and be in good standing with the Lt. Governor's Division of Corporations and Trademarks and the VI Internal Revenue Bureau.

Applications for the STEP pro-

gram are available at both district EDA offices, the Small Business Administration and the Small Business Development Center.

Applications should be accompanied by a copy of the most recent business license and a letter of good standing from the Lt. Governor's office. The deadline for applications and supporting documents is Feb. 6. Documents can be delivered to the EDA offices at 5055 Norre Gade, St. Thomas or 116 King Street, Frederiksted, faxed to 777-8399 or emailed to . For information, call Kean or Tamra Graham at 714-1700.



Susan Ellis

Jennifer Matarangas-King, senior vice president of Innovative Companies, presents a check to Ana Davila, chief executive officer of United Way of St. Croix Wednesday. ICC employees enjoyed a company-provided lunch while they completed pledge cards to United Way.

Innovative, employees donate more than \$15K to United Way

SUSAN ELLIS

ST. CROIX — United Way of St. Croix received a donation and employee pledges from Innovative Companies Wednesday and launched a discount prescription program at the Innovative Service Center on St. Croix.

The \$10,000 donation from Innovative kicked off the fundraising campaign that ends March 31, but people can donate any time, Ana Davila, United Way chief executive officer said. Historically, Innovative has been one of the charity's biggest supporters and employees pledged or donated more than \$5,000 in addition to the company's \$10,000 contribution.

"We want to make an impact on people's lives and with Innovative giving this check, we can see the light down the tunnel," Davila said.

According to Jennifer Matarangas-King, Innovative senior vice president, employees can make a one time donation or use payroll deduction to contribute to United Way and staff

donations have averaged between \$5,000-\$7,000. The deductions can stop and start at any time, so some of the staff members have been donating for years.

"We're doing a really good job of supporting the community," King said. "It's a nice way for people to know I'm supporting an organization."

While Innovative employees signed pledge cards and made donations, Davila handed out FamilyWize prescription discount cards.

"Anyone who doesn't have insurance can use the card for prescriptions and anyone with insurance can use the card for prescriptions that are not covered by insurance," Davila said.

The cards are free and people can contact United Way of St. Croix or text "family" to 700700. There are no forms to complete and no waiting period or registration and the card can be used immediately. Family members can use the same card and those who are not U.S. citizens can use the card in U.S. pharmacies.

FamilyWize, in partnership

with United Way, acts like a big consumer group buying service and the discounts are provided voluntarily by participating pharmacies that provide prices similar to those given to large insurance companies and employers.

On St. Croix, Kmart is the participating pharmacy. So far, other pharmacies have not chosen to offer residents without insurance pricing similar to what they offer insurance companies. Participating pharmacies benefit with increased traffic flow and customers who may buy other items while filling their prescriptions. If the pharmacy's price is lower, the customer will pay the lower price but there will be no additional discount.

According to FamilyWize, more than \$450 million has been saved by 5.2 million card users. Since December 31, 2012, Virgin Islanders have saved over \$12,000 in general medications and more than \$46,000 in other medical services related to heart disease and diabetes, according to Davila.

TOM EADER

ST. CROIX — Virgin Islands residents will have an opportunity this week to learn about the territory's street addressing initiative, which will be tested in Estate Mon Bijou on St. Croix, downtown Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas and Cruz Bay on St. John.

The Office of the Lieutenant Governor, which is the custodian of the territory's Geographic Information System (GIS) data, has spearheaded the project to create a standardized addressing system for all the roads in the Virgin Islands.

"The lack of a standardized addressing system affects more than the ability of our residents and tourists to navigate our streets with ease," Lt. Gov. Gregory Francis said in a prepared statement issued last week. "It is a public safety issue that we are committed to improve."

The University of the Virgin Islands Eastern Caribbean Center is assisting to launch the pilot phase of the initiative.

Now that a study of the territory's existing addressing system has been completed, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor can create an addressing system that allows for the efficient use of global positioning system (GPS) technology.

Francis said in a news release issued last week that he is hopeful the pilot projects will boost the community's participation in the street addressing initiative.

"Address assignment cannot take place on unnamed roads," Francis stated. "Street addressing is a community initiative and community participation is critical to our goal of achieving addressing throughout our community."

Public meetings scheduled to discuss street naming project

Francis is calling on residents to work together within their communities to collect and submit their street name recommendations to the Office of the Lieutenant Governor.

Additionally, a series of community meetings will be held this week to discuss the pilot project and what residents can expect to occur as the territory begins the first phases of transitioning toward a standardized addressing system. Residents of the pilot project communities, community leaders and the general public are invited to attend the scheduled meetings.

The first meeting will be held from 3:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesday at St. Ursula's Multipurpose Center on St. John. The second meeting will take place from 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at Charlotte Amalie High School on St. Thomas. The last meeting will be held from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday at John H. Woodson Junior High School on St. Croix.

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