



NEWS RELEASE

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Small business assistance helps Virginia artists realize their dream

RICHMOND, Va. – Houston E. Gray, District Director (A) of the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Richmond District Office today recognized Cynthia and Sean Haynie, owners of Appomattox Tile Art, Inc. of Petersburg, Va. for their small business success.

“Congratulations are in order for Cindy and Sean for taking the risk of starting a business and creating employment opportunities for so many people in the Petersburg area.”

Their company, opened in 1999, is one of the largest and most successful, privately-owned, custom mosaic tile manufacturers in the country. Both of the Haynies are professional artists in their own right. They founded the company believing they could offer good artistic design and service to the tile industry. Through the leadership of this husband and wife team, Appomattox Tile Art grew from a small three-person business to employing 25 people and providing service to 67 high-end tile showrooms throughout the United States.

Cindy and Sean met at Radford University where they both earned Bachelors of Fine Arts degrees. After graduation, they worked in the graphics and advertising industry and saw the market potential which helped to foster their business concept: providing the tile industry with unique custom designs and attentive customer service. The couple returned to Cindy’s hometown and opened a mosaic tile manufacturing facility in historic Old Towne Petersburg. They started in a 7,000 square-foot facility and quickly employed 12 people.

Although Cindy and Sean knew a lot about artistic design and manufacturing mosaic tiles, their business skills were limited to previous careers. An acquaintance referred them to Diane Howerton at the Crater Small Business Development Center of Longwood University.

According to Cindy, “Diane helped with everything from financial projections to publicity.” Along with counseling and training assistance, the SBDC assisted the Haynies with an application for an SBA Pre-Qualification Loan in the amount of \$68,450 which was subsequently approved by both the SBA and the Bank of McKenney. The funds were used to purchase vital equipment, purchase additional inventory and to provide working capital for the business operation.

SBDCs provide management assistance to current and prospective small business owners. The centers offer one-stop assistance to individuals and small businesses by providing a wide variety of information and guidance in central and easily accessible branch locations. The program is a cooperative effort of the private sector, the educational community and federal, state and local governments. The SBDC program is partially funded by the SBA.

The 7(a) Loan Guaranty Program is SBA's primary lending program. It provides loan guaranties for small businesses unable to secure financing on reasonable terms through normal lending channels. The program operates through private-sector lenders who provide loans which are, in turn, guaranteed by the SBA. A maximum loan amount of \$2 million has been established for 7(a) loans. However, the maximum dollar amount of the SBA guaranty is generally \$1.5 million.

The eligibility requirements are designed to be as broad as possible in order that this lending program can accommodate the most diverse variety of small business financing needs.

The business now operates in a 46,000 square-foot manufacturing facility on Bank Street in historic Old Towne Petersburg, purchased by the Haynies in 2003. Built in the early 1900s, the building is an old assembly plant and showroom for model-A Fords.

Cindy said, "This building was an excellent match for us because the front showroom has mosaic tiles throughout the main lobby and entrance area." Customers entering the showroom can't help but notice the colorful mosaic tiles all around them – the old, historic ones on the floor and the new samples on display throughout the showroom.

Most recently, Appomattox Tile Art secured an exclusive contract with Ann Sacks, a major high-end tile dealer with 17 locations in cities across the country. The results of the contract are a doubling of their production and an increase the company's employee base of up to 50 people.

The Haynies complement each other's artistic skill with Cindy's strength in design, sales and business strategy and Sean's focus on artistic design and technology. The real success story for Appomattox Tile Art is the persistence and determination of the owners to keep the doors open during the transitional and growth oriented stages. The Haynies credit the support provided by Diane Howerton at the Crater SBDC as one of the reasons they have been able to persevere through the difficult times.

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