

# Grant funds Web help for small businesses

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Published Wednesday, March 31, 2010

NORFOLK—The Small Business Development Center of Hampton Roads Inc., an affiliate of the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, was awarded a \$23,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation on Tuesday to help small businesses hurt by the closure of Franklin's paper mill.

The grant will help the SBDC assist the small-business community in Franklin and Southampton and Isle of Wight counties.

SBDC Executive Director Jim Carroll, who also serves as vice president for small business with the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, said he was very pleased to receive the grant from the Verizon Foundation, which is the philanthropic arm of Verizon Communications Inc.

"This will help us put together a business information site on the Hampton Roads Web site to help the businesses in the Franklin area," Carroll said Tuesday. "It will be there to help small-business owners better manage their businesses, to help them through the part of dealing with the International Paper closure, and then trying to reposition themselves once they figure out what's going to happen with the reuse of the facility."

According to estimates from the SBDC, about 2,000 people in businesses near International Paper Co.'s Franklin mill will be impacted by its closure.

The \$23,000 will be used for the SBDC's Small Business Recovery program. The organization plans to provide a series of seven e-books that can be accessed through its Web site. SBDC also will also conduct a series of "profit mastery" courses designed to help small-business owners establish new business models.

"Verizon is honored to assist the SBDC in providing the necessary funding for the small businesses and give them the opportunity to have a new start and a new beginning," said Laura Barnes, area manager for Verizon.

SBDC also plans to partner with the Virginia Electronic Commerce Technology Center to conduct a series of e-commerce courses.

"This grant is a real godsend for us," Carroll said. "One of the challenges we have is getting information out to small-business owners. By being able to put up this information, as well as a variety of other information into this small-business library, people can access it on our Web site anytime of day or night and it will help get information more widely distributed throughout the region."

Carroll added, “It’s going to be a long road, but with the help of Verizon and the support we’re getting from the Franklin-Southampton Area Chamber of Commerce, Franklin-Southampton Economic Development Inc., the Downtown Franklin Association and the Franklin Business Incubator, I think the small-business community is going to be very well served.”