

Sylvester Woodworker Turns Passion Into Profitable Business

David and Virginia Acord's company is firmly rooted in the rich soil of southwest Georgia. "About 15 years ago, David was an electrician and worked at two auto auctions during the week," says Virginia. "He loved working with wood, so he bought a portable sawmill and put it in our backyard. On weekends he went to different homes and cut people's logs into lumber."

The idea for their Sylvester-based business rose from a building demolition. While salvaging reclaimed heart pine at the site, David realized he could convert his passion into a full time enterprise and their business began to blossom.

Southern Heritage Woodworks reclaims antique heart pine from older buildings and mills it to create beautiful, highly sought-after flooring and unique handcrafted furniture. David oversees production of the company's flooring and furniture divisions and Virginia is the business manager. Despite 15 years of steadily increasing sales, neither had ever taken a class in business. So when their company threatened to outgrow their backyard, they called the SBDC for guidance.



David and Virginia Acord

"We had erected some metal buildings in our backyard and were treating the company like a home-based business – like a farm," she says. "But our business kept growing. We needed a larger building. Since we hadn't had any formal business training, we started asking people we knew different business questions." Their inquiries led them to SBDC Consultant David Dunn at the SBDC's Albany office. "He's been absolutely great," says Virginia.

The Acords asked Dunn to help them apply for a OneGeorgia grant they needed to purchase an 80,000 square-foot industrial building. "I didn't know how to create the business plan required," says Virginia. "He took me step-by-step and told me the different things I would need."

"Rebecca O'Neal with the Southwest Georgia RDC helped us write the OneGeorgia grant proposal. Without both of them, I would have stopped many times," she says.

They delivered their proposal to the Worth County EDA and were the first company in south Georgia to be awarded a OneGeorgia grant. They purchased the building and their staff grew from 14 to 28. They're working with Dunn now on financial and work flow analyses.

"Without David, we would struggle getting around various roadblocks. I've called with a problem, like an extremely large utility bill, and he's put me in touch with Georgia Tech to run a survey to measure and analyze our use. He's helped me find answers to any questions I've had during the last three years."

Virginia recommends the SBDC to every small business owner. "Just go there and ask your questions. If they can help you, they will. If they can't, they'll find someone who can. David has always gone out of his way to help me, and I don't feel intimidated when I call."

The company markets its products online at www.southernheritagewoodworks.com and major merchandise shows. The Acords recently opened a permanent showroom at AmericasMart in downtown Atlanta.

"Theirs is a true entrepreneur story, from hobby to home-based business to stand-alone operation to one of the county's major manufacturers," says Dunn. "They're good people to work with, and their company has been very successful."