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Michelin fund to aid 4 more Upstate businesses

Low interest loans have created up to 91 jobs

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Four companies from Greenville, Pickens and Spartanburg counties have received funding from Michelin Development Upstate in its efforts to help strengthen the Upstate economy.

The low-interest loans, totaling more than \$120,000, are going to Steam Force Car Wash, Greenville; DW&K Transportation, Duncan; Chic Chapeau II, Easley; and FindCarolinaDentists.com, Greenville.

Michelin North America set aside \$1 million to fund Michelin Development Upstate. The economic development organization provides funding and business expertise to socially and economically disadvantaged businesses throughout the region. With the new loans, the organization has funded seven small businesses for a total of \$235,000 and the creation of up to 91 jobs.

“With each loan application we consider, the Michelin Development steering committee becomes increasingly impressed by the creative and passionate business owners we have in the Upstate,” said John Tully, president of Michelin Development. “In the midst of a difficult economy, the spirit of entrepreneurship and ingenuity of these businesses is alive and well.”

Greenville-based Steam Force Car Wash LLC, with locations at Haywood Mall and Woodruff Road, uses an environmentally friendly technique. The operation, owned by Nishant Shah, uses high-pressure steam, consuming half a gallon of water per car rather than the standard 45 gallons.

“For a small business like ours, even with a revolutionary process everyone is very excited about, it is hard to be competitive under current economic conditions without spending a lot of money on marketing,” Shah said.

DW&K Transportation, started in 2006, moves U.S. mail to Woodruff, Union, Cross Anchor and Lockhart. DeWayne White, who began the business by cashing in his retirement savings to pursue a government contract, plans to expand by hiring employees and adding a second truck.

“It’s very hard for a small business in this economy to find the funding needed to take advantage of growth opportunities.” White said.

Chic Chapeau II soon will be one of downtown Easley’s newest businesses. Owner Shirley Young plans to open the hat store for women and men next month and is using the loan to add inventory and transform a historic Main Street space into a destination shop.

“Everyone I talked to thought it was a good idea because there aren’t many options in the area just for hats,” she said. “Michelin ... provided advice that has already moved the business forward.”

Erik Feeney began FindCarolinaDentists.com to help dentists connect with patients online. The idea is to help dentists build and expand their practices.

“Michelin has given me the ability to build and constantly upgrade the site not only to remain competitive, but to outperform national competitors,” he said.

“Money that was once available for startup businesses like mine, even though the initial and fixed costs are very low in comparison to other industries, just isn’t out there right now.”

Michelin Development still is accepting applications for low-interest loans. Applications can be submitted online at www.michelindevelopment.us. When business owners register and receive a user login, they will be asked to outline business plans and strategies.