

A **LEDO** IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED

“My grandfather owned a conifer hot bed and my father and I inherited the business,” Aleksandar Markovic, from Banja Koviljaca begins his story . Aleksandar is one of the lucky recipients of a loan from the Serbian Support Fund for Underdeveloped Areas.

“I run a business for landscaping maintenance, called “MINI”. “MINI” later expanded its package of services and included garden maintenance, sowing decorative conifers, mowing grass, landscape design. We also construct decorative stoneware fountains. I submitted a loan

“Our family friend, received a 10,000 EUR loan for production of cleaning and chemical products, shampoos and bath foams through the LEDO. He had a hard time in the beginning, but then he was contacted by a large distributor from Belgrade who started buying bigger quantities, and all of a sudden his business just boomed” Milena Manojlovic Knezevic shares some of the other successful experiences.

application in August 2007, upon a solicitation for entrepreneurship loans applications. I didn't have a clue about the procedure. People working in Local Economic Development Office (LEDO) in Loznica guided us all the way. They even organized a two day meeting and experts from Belgrade came over and explained the importance of having a developed business plan in place in order to obtain a loan. LEDO staff gave us all the data,

answered tirelessly all of our questions, helped us with filling out the sheets and forms”, explains Aleksandar excitedly.

“I got EUR 10,000 for five years, with a one year grace period. One of our first clients is a married couple that used to live in Switzerland for more than 30 years. The lady is from Loznica and her husband is a Swiss, accustomed to have his plants, grass and garden trees neatly maintained, like in the “Home and Garden” magazine. They were surprised to find that in Serbia this kind of service is almost non existent. One day they spotted our commercial on local TV and found out about us and that is how we kicked off”, Aleksandar finishes his story. He hopes that more people, who love gardens but don't have enough time to maintain them, will come forward and become his clients. He is certain that the quality of his services will earn his family a good living.

Another loan recipient is Milena Manojlovic Knezevic, owner of the “Detex” textile company. She shared her story, stating that in the stressful period of applying for a loan, her greatest support were the people working in the LEDO. “My husband owns the business, we used to have a shop before and then decided to start production. We used to purchase slippers in Novi Sad and sell them in Loznica and since that worked quite well, we decided to start our own production. When the Serbian Support Fund for Underdeveloped Areas, through a local branch in Loznica, announced a public call for entrepreneurship loans applications, we applied and were granted 25,000 EUR. Our core work focuses on slippers manufacturing and trading in children's clothes, underwear, haberdashery and Tetovo wool”. She says it is hard to find a market and her company mostly sells in the neighboring towns of Cacak, Sabac, Arilje, Bogatic and of course, Loznica.

“The Loznica LEDO was informing us all the time about new developments and news, and providing us with advice. They helped everyone with putting together the necessary documentation and they were always there to provide timely and accurate information. I am an economist and I did the Business Plan myself. I asked the LED people for assistance, and they were so patient and kind not just to me, but also to others who were seeking advice”.

As far as Milena can tell, 67 businesses and 100 shops received loans from the Serbian Support Fund for Underdeveloped Areas. She has also heard about a family from Draginci that obtained financing for the production of children clothing from the Serbian Development Fund. They employ more than 20 people.

“We’ve hired 6 workers already and our intention is to increase capacities and purchase new equipment - 5 sewing machines, file reeling machines, knives, and the cobblers prepared the stencils, so tools were made according to their requirements”, continues Milena.

There are many more stories like these two in Loznica. The professional and caring attitude of the Loznica LEDO staff facilitated to a great extent the sometimes painful loan application process. The LEDO staff knows that sustainable local growth lies in the hands of private businesses and they gave their best in making the dreams of many small entrepreneurs come true.