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Black-owned business TDM Technologies International looks to expand after winning business grant

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Torrence Mack

Torrence Mack, owner of TDM Technologies International, teaches a tech literacy class at a Florida Blue facility.

Thanks to a \$25,000 enhancement grant from The Coalition to Back Black Business, Torrence Mack has the opportunity to fund his longtime dream of expanding his business.

"It came along at the right time completely to help me continue with my growth. At some point, I want to be in all of the Southeastern United States, every state," said Mack, owner of the Miami-based TDM Technologies International. "This expansion will allow me to open up new markets in different states, different counties."

TDM Technologies International is focused on instructing senior communities in the use of everyday technology. The company offers classes in 40 counties across Florida, as well as in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina and Alabama.

The grant program, intended to aid the long-term growth of Black-owned businesses, targeted 14 owners across the country. The Coalition to Back Black Business (CBBB) was created in September 2020 as a joint effort between the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and American Express to help small businesses suffering during the pandemic. CBBB is partnered with The National Black Chamber of Commerce, the National Business League, U.S. Black Chambers, Inc. and Walker's Legacy, and funded this year by Cummins, Optimum, and Shopify. The program has distributed \$8.5 million in grants.

The grants are awarded to candidates that participate in CBBB mentorship and professional development opportunities throughout the year. A panel of judges selected this year's 14 recipients out of a pool of 324.

Florida ranks among the top 10 best states for minority entrepreneurs, according to a recent report, distributing more business loans to underserved communities compared to the national average. But Mack, 53, of Miami Gardens, said it's still difficult to get financial assistance being a small Black business.

"A lot of banks don't want to take chances on you, even though you do have a good business model," he said. "Financing is always a challenge. Some of my vendors that sponsor my events, they don't pay right away. Sometimes, you have to wait months to get paid. And when that happens, you have to pretty much bootstrap everything, fund it out of your pocket."

TDM Technologies International partners with Medicare Advantage companies, including Humana, WellCare, Devoted Health and Florida Blue to provide courses in tech literacy to seniors. The sessions, Mack said, are often based out of the insurance providers' own facilities, as well as medical and senior centers.

Mack started the company six years ago after moving back to South Florida from Maryland. The idea for TDM was born out of a chance encounter.

"I went to a Best Buy store and there was a senior lady, she was having difficulty with their smartphone," Mack said. "I helped her with the problems that she was having, and she said, 'You should do this as a business.' So, a light bulb went off in my head and I put an ad in the Palm Beach Post. One lady responded, and I started teaching her. And then she introduced me to her friend ... and we started finding senior communities. The very first class I did, I had 100 people show up."

There is a growing need for tech literacy in seniors, Mack said, thus an increase in the demand for the service his company provides.

"A key thing is the telehealth situation," he said. "A lot of them need that, because a lot of the companies are now going forward with the telehealth mechanism, and a lot of the seniors have no idea how to connect with the telehealth. And another big thing is the QR codes."

The company offers a range of classes, with 10 of the most popular dealing with topics such as the basics of navigating a smartphone, utilizing Zoom and connecting via social media.

"In our classes, we make sure they learn, we make sure they retain ... a lot of seniors call me, letting me know that they finally understood what I was telling them in the class," he said.

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