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Conference attracts small business owners and those who want to be

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Karen Walker will soon realize her dream of owning a daycare - if she can borrow money to buy a house. She is so excited about the daycare, she said. But the thought of asking for a loan terrifies her.

So Walker and her prospective business partner, Teresa Payne, learned how to develop a business plan and of the many avenues for financing Thursday at the Small Business Development Conference in Danville.

Small business owners and those wishing to start businesses also learned how to sell to the government, how to be more customer-friendly, how to market their ventures, and how to legally operate a home-based business at the free conference organized by the Small Business Administration.

But one business owner said the most valuable part of the conference was networking.

"I get all kinds of business from these things," Cherie Carroll said. Carroll designs Web sites. She started her company, KyWebmaster, in 1997. She said she's doing well; she gets most of her customers by word-of-mouth.

Several rented booths

Carroll and many other business owners rented booths during the conference. They weren't allowed to sell anything, but they could network and give out promotional materials.

Carroll handed out brochures with some Web site design tips and names of free or low-cost software. Steve Amsler, owner of Apparell and Promotional Products, also gave away brochures.

Entrepreneurs visited Ideas Etc.'s booth to pick up a resource



Jessica Lake, left, and Brian Marstella talk with Aflec Regional Sales Coordinator Arthur Priddy. (Mike Moore Photo)



Gail Vaughn, with the Bluegrass Community and Technical College, introduces participants to the Small Business Development Conference. (Mike Moore Photo)

planner, which includes a business start-up checklist, a list of helpful phone numbers, a calendar, a Kentucky map, a planner, a metric conversion chart, a summary of business laws, and many other tidbits business owners may find useful.

Ideas, Etc. made the books in collaboration with the SBA. Ideas, Etc. makes marketing materials. At the same booth, conference participants received a keychain shaped like a horse's head and a mint box shaped like Kentucky.

"It's a unique business," president Jerry Griggs said.

Farmer's National, Community Trust and Fifth Third banks told entrepreneurs of their available SBA loans.

Chamber, SBA hope to continue it

The conference was the first in Danville's recent history, according to Paula Fowler Kilby, Chamber of Commerce executive director. But the chamber and the SBA hope to continue it.

The SBA's senior area manager Arch McAlister said he decided to have the conference here because he found that many people in the area aren't aware of the resources available to them. He thought Danville was a central location where business owners from the whole region could attend.

He said people who attended previous conferences have told him they were able to open their businesses because of the help they received.

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Tom Poland of Farmers National Bank introduces what his bank has to offer to the convention attendees. (Mike Moore Photo)