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## Local Entrepreneur set to Graduate from SBA Initiative to Create Jobs/Growth in Atlanta's Inner City

Ken Taunton is Managing Director and owner of the Royster Group. This is an executive search and medical staffing firm based in Atlanta and one of 16 firms that recently completed the SBA's *Emerging 200* Initiative for inner-city entrepreneurs in the city.

The U.S. Small Business Administration will honor Taunton and his fellow participants in its Emerging 200 Initiative (e200) at a graduation ceremony in Atlanta on January 6th. Earlier this year the SBA's e200 program identified 200 inner-city businesses across the nation that demonstrated a high potential for growth. It then provided these small businesses with a free, four-month course of in-depth business education that focused on areas such as growth strategies and management, market development and strategic planning.

Atlanta was one of only ten e200 participating cities. Others included Albuquerque, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Des Moines, Memphis, Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Philadelphia.

"The basic goal of our Emerging 200 Atlanta initiative was to help promising inner-city firms step up to the next level," said SBA Georgia District Director Terri Denison. "Assisting firms in developing an effective growth strategy will not only help their bottom line but also generate economic benefits for the neighborhoods in which they are located."

The local initiative has focused on 16 small companies in Atlanta that have the potential for rapid expansion and job creation. Companies selected for the initiative were those with a threshold of approximately \$400,000 in annual revenue and an operational track record of at least three years.

The Georgia SBA District Office completed the last of its Emerging 200 training classes for its group of small businesses on December 16. This special training, held at the SBA's local office in Peachtree Center, was cosponsored with the Atlanta Development Authority and Atlanta Workforce Development Agency.

Taunton said the e200 Initiative has helped his firm focus on gaining new business while improving employee productivity.

Six months ago, Taunton's company received the first of four federal contracts through the SBA's 8(a) Business Development Program. Named after Section 8(a) of the Small Business Act, it helps small, disadvantaged businesses gain access to federal and private contracting opportunities. The Royster Group became certified in the 8(a) Program four years ago, but only recently obtained contracts with the Department of Army, the Department of Navy and FEMA.

The Royster Group's first 8(a) contract was with the Department of Army to help recruit a team of physicians to treat soldiers who are suffering from traumatic brain injuries. Three months ago, Taunton also received his GSA Schedule which opened up a potential market of over \$140 million for the company.

The e200 training applied a real-world teaching approach along with a condensed MBA-like curriculum that has been reviewed by academics and then road tested by entrepreneurs. The e200 training is based on the case study model with examples drawn from the participating entrepreneurs' businesses.

One objective of the program was for participants to draft a three-year strategic growth plan for their businesses. At the last e200 class, Taunton and the other company owners presented their growth plans for review by one of four panels made up of CPAs, bankers, SBA retired SCORE counselors, and other professional business consultants.

Atlanta's inner city is home to over 5,600 establishments which collectively employ 141,000 workers. Some 96 percent of Atlanta inner-city businesses employ fewer than 100 people, while 83 percent employ fewer than 20 workers.

**The other local e200 participating companies were:**

**ABC Early Learning Academy**, Victoria Williams, Executive Director/CEO

**A Budget Lock & Door**, Muriel Montia, CFO

**Allen Professional Graphics Group**, Monica Allen, President

**Blue Sombrero**, Peter Santora, Co-Founder

**C.J. Hearne Construction Company**, Christine Hearne, Owner

**Defender Security & Communication**, Derrick Parker, President

**F.M. Shelton Inc.**, Fawn M. Shelton, CEO

**HTS Enterprises**, Gary Harris, President/CEO

**Jackson's Dental Center**, Montina G. Jackson, CEO

**Matrix 3D**, Charles Bythwood, Principal

**Om & Hecho**, LLP, Suna Om, General Partner

**Professional Document Services**, Derrick Black, President

**Rainey Apparel Manufacturing**, Russell Rainey, President

**Smokymountainstone.com**, Michelle Uchiyama, President

**Sweet Auburn Bread Company**, Sonya Jones, Owner/CEO

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