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State business center recognizes Sweet Poppin's

Downtown business one of nine to earn EDGE award.

By Daniel Human Tribune staff writer

Business has been good, but an award made it better, the owner of a Kokomo business said.

The Indiana Small Business Development Center gave an EDGE Award this week to Sweet Poppin's, a popcorn shop in downtown Kokomo that tweaks the taste of the snack-time favorite with flavors such as snickerdoodle and caramel apple.

The shop, located at 107 E. Sycamore St., was among nine small businesses in the state to receive the recognition from the government agency.

Award recipients must participate in one of the business development center's programs.

In Sweet Poppin's case, store owner Tashia Johnson-St. Clair took part in, among other services, the ISBDC Collegiate Management Program. She worked with business students at Indiana University Kokomo who helped her develop a business plan and market study.

"That helped me out an awful lot," Johnson-St. Clair said. "My business plan is amazing."

Indiana Representative Mike Karickhoff issued a statement Friday lauding Johnson-St. Clair for her award.

"Despite what we may hear in the news about a struggling economy and failing businesses, small businesses, like Sweet Poppin's, have proven that with a customer-based business plan, terrific service and innovative product ideas businesses can succeed," Karickhoff said.

Johnson-St. Clair began making flavored popcorns in 2003, delivering orders from her home.

She opened a store on the north end of Kokomo set back from U.S. 31, but she decided she could get more business downtown.

The city of Kokomo gave Sweet Poppin's a \$15,000 revolving loan, and she moved to her current store in July. Her business has since tripled, according to the small business development center.

The business growth and award have all been part of progressive momentum for the gourmet popcorn shop, Johnson-St. Clair said.

She has been able to promote her sweet treats at the Kentucky Derby, Indiana Black Expo and the Soul Train Music Awards.

A few of Indiana's casinos have also agreed to start selling her popcorn in their gift shops, she said.

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