

Bison Star Naturals is one of six enterprises that shared $60,000 of investment in 2018 as part of the Native American Venture Acceleration Fund program administered by the Regional Development Corporation.

NAVAF aims to create jobs by boosting revenue and advancing the business goals of Native American-owned Northern New Mexico companies.

Jacquelene and Angelo McHorse, owners of Bison Star Naturals, sought the funds to launch a line of liquid jojoba and yucca root soap to augment the bar soaps and lotions the business is known for.

“We also are expanding our line to include our unscented lotion,” Jacquelene said. “The funding allows us to release a new product line and expand our current offerings — which are great leaps for our small business.”

The NAVAF was launched in 2011 by the Regional Development Corporation and Los Alamos National Security LLC, the company that managed Los Alamos National Laboratory until November, 2018.

At the time of LANL’s management transition, more than $390,000 had been invested in the regional economy through the NAVAF. Triad, LANL’s new manager, has vowed to retain most of the laboratory’s economic development initiatives — programs such as the NAVAF — although a spokesperson said some programs may look different going forward.

Other 2018 recipients include Jacqueline Gala Jewelry and PM Waterlily of Taos Pueblo, Butterfly Artist Market of Pojoaque Pueblo, Aguilar Consulting of San Ildefonso Pueblo, and the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council based in Ohkay Owingeh.

In addition to providing money that recipients will use for software and equipment acquisition, manufacturing, and the establishment of an arts and crafts show, NAVAF benefits include technical assistance from the RDC and its partner organizations. The Bison Star Naturals owners said they plan to pursue the connections and opportunities that accompany the funds.

MORE THAN MONEY

“The RDC offers an incredible amount of resources for small businesses and entrepreneurs in Northern New Mexico,” Angelo said. “[RDC consultant] Lindsay Taylor has diligently worked to connect us with the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership, accounting services, and connections for potential markets.”

In addition to manufacturing assistance from New Mexico MEP, the couple sought help with bookkeeping. “Accounting presents the greatest challenge as a small business operation — especially when you only have a small team of two people,” Jacquelene said. “Accounting has a steep learning curve that requires a large investment in time, effort and dedication.” The couple can focus on growing the business because a CPA now helps manage its finances.

And growing is what the business is doing. The couple’s five-year plan includes selling their products at hotels, resorts, airports and major retailers; expanding the online store; and introducing a full suite of body wash, shampoo and hair conditioner.

“In five years’ time we hope to open our own facility that has the capacity to produce all of our products in-house, while also employing local New Mexicans,” Jacquelene said. “This year we have some big plans: We will release our unscented lotion in January and the liquid soap this spring.”

Bison Star Naturals can be found at the Gathering of Nations in April, the New Mexico Artisan Market in November and at www.bisonstarnaturals.com. Learn more about the NAVAF at www.rdcnm.org/navaf. Finance New Mexico connects individuals and businesses with skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org .

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