



Export Success Story

University-Government Partnership Helps Local Small Businesses Export

Contact: Brian Davis, Phone–205-348-7621; bdavis@aitc.ua.edu
Alabama International Trade Center (AITC)
The University of Alabama

Old Iron Doors Swing Jobs Back to Alabama

A new manufacturing facility for custom wrought iron doors will soon be completed in Jefferson County, providing 30 new jobs for the community in Bessemer. Those jobs were originally located in Mexico to take advantage of lower wage rates and a historical tradition of handcrafting products from wrought iron.

Eduardo Cuneo, local entrepreneur and owner of Old Iron Doors, LLC, is happy to be moving the jobs closer to home and to his customer base. He opened a small importing and retail business several years ago in Birmingham, shipping his designs and orders to a supplier in Mexico, where iron was then fashioned into finished products, and shipped back to the U.S. for distribution.

During the last three years of operation, sales had grown annually with an established network of fourteen distributors around the country. The firm had become one of the top names in the custom wrought iron industry in the United States. It was one of the biggest U.S. manufacturers and distributors with show rooms in Atlanta, Birmingham, Phoenix, Tucson, and Las Vegas.

The only limitation Cuneo faced was the capacity of his Mexican supplier offshore and the time it took to complete every single operation and move the product into the U.S. marketplace. He wanted to have a manufacturing facility and control the operation himself.

Like any business expansion, financing played a critical role to bring Cuneo's dream to reality. Mr. Cuneo contacted the Alabama International Trade Center and working with AITC export finance specialist Carol DeCastr, they crafted a viable plan and financing package that got a bank interested in the project.

As a result, Old Iron Doors LLC secured a SBA guaranteed loan and obtained the necessary funds to build its manufacturing facility in Jefferson County, Alabama. The state of the art facility will make custom wrought iron doors to satisfy the growing demand of the domestic

U.S. market. Old Iron Doors will use the construction and equipment loan backed by SBA to grow the business and expand in the U.S. market.

“The new facility will enable us to produce a 100% American-made product from the components and accessories to the finished product,” says Mr. Cuneo. “We are looking forward to continue with a second phase of producing windows to complement the door product line.”

Unlike other wrought iron doors in the market, Old Iron Doors takes special care to design every little detail of the final product putting special attention to engineering the finishes and creating special packing for every product. The firm can closely oversee that process now here at home, rather than working at a distance and relying upon offshore suppliers.

“Assistance from the Alabama International Trade Center brought this project to fruition quickly, and helped us expand our market share and improve our quality over the imported products,” says Eduardo Cuneo.

In a global economy, more jobs for Alabama are refreshing news.