

# 2005 SUCCESS STORY



## SEW ♥ COUNTRY

***“The KSBDC is a great resource for small communities. It’s good to have a place to go to for information that most small business owners don’t know how to find.”***

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Name of Business	SEW COUNTRY
Nature of Business	Gift store, quilting fabric and hand-guided machine
Owner	Sheila Cornett
Address	1834 M Street, Belleville, Kansas 66935
Phone	785-527-2332
Fax	785-527-2332
E-mail	sewcountry@nckcn.com
Business Structure	Sole Proprietor
Business Began	September 1992
Employees at Start Up	1 Full-Time
Employees in 2005	1 Full-Time/4 Part-Time and 7 workshop teachers
Revenues in 2004	\$140,000
2005 Sales Forecast	\$150,000
Start Up Capital	\$50,000
Source of Initial Capital	Personal Savings then a County Revolving Loan and Main Street Incentive Without Walls Grant
Line of Credit in 2004	\$20,000
SBDC Counselor	Linda Sutton

What do you do when your company is bursting at the seams? Sheila Cornett, owner of Sew Country, knew exactly what she needed to do. Expand her business. By 2002, Cornett’s business outgrew her single storefront on Belleville’s historic downtown square. After looking at a number of other larger buildings to relocate her business, Cornett decided to buy a vacant storefront next door, knock a hole in the wall, and double the floor space. A previous small inventory of gift items created a second source of income. The additional space also gave Cornett the opportunity to purchase a quilting machine, which allows customers to enjoy a finished project in a shorter period of time. With assistance of the Belleville Main Street program, Cornett renovated both storefronts to reflect the historic qualities of the 100-year-old buildings.

Cornett, a former bank executive, decided to take the risk to open her own small business in 1992 and build on a lifelong love of home sewing and crafts after her daughter graduated from college. In the beginning, Sew Country only offered fashion fabrics for customers who sewed their own clothes. Cornett expanded into craft items as she saw a demand.

As times changed, however, Cornett stayed abreast of new trends. She noticed the demand for fashion fabric declining. At the same time, she noticed a rekindling of interest in quilt making among local women who formerly made their own garments. Gradually Cornett retooled

her inventory to specialize in high-quality cotton quilt fabrics. Research indicated serious quilters spend a great deal of time to create a quilt for themselves or family members, and shunned the low quality fabrics found at discount stores for a project they expect to last a century or more. Quilting brings together both older women who learned quilt making from their grandmothers, and younger women with little sewing expertise. Sew Country began to offer classes for beginning quilt makers and also those with experience who wanted to learn cutting-edge techniques.

Every June Sew Country participates in a regional quilters “shop hop” and other quilt shows during the year. This has expanded the base of regular customers to a 100-mile radius of Belleville, and numerous other travelers from across Kansas and the United States who visit the shop one or more times a year. Who doesn’t remember snuggling up in their grandmother’s old quilt?

“Customer service is key to success in a small community. I always feel good when I’ve played a part in helping someone create a quilt that will be appreciated and become a heirloom for their families for generations to come.”