



HOUSTON-GALVESTON AREA COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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H-GAC, HARRIS COUNTY BRING ADDITIONAL RELIEF TO SMALL BUSINESSES BY CONVERTING ALL DISTRIBUTED COVID-19 FORGIVABLE LOANS TO GRANTS

HOUSTON, TX – Earlier in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic began severely impacting small businesses, Harris County joined the Houston-Galveston Area Council to bring immediate relief to those businesses in the county with the Harris County COVID-19 Forgivable Loan Program. A total of 444 area small businesses received interest-free loans of up to \$25,000, which would be forgiven after five years. Now, thanks to federal CARES Act funding received by the county, every single one of those loans has been converted into grants.

“Many of the owners have already made use of the funds they received. Knowing that they don’t have to pay it back, that it’s all theirs, gives them one less thing to worry about at a time when so many have been impacted,” said Omar Fortune, manager of the Houston-Galveston Area Local Development Corporation (H-GALDC), which handled the underwriting process and distribution of loans to small businesses. “We’re pleased to be able to provide this gift to these small businesses that are so important to our region. That it’s happening during the holiday season makes it even more special.”



Dr. Randy Mitchmore, D.D.S., owner of the LifeSmiles by Dr. Randy Mitchmore dental practice located in the Houston Museum District, was one of 444 small business owners who had his Harris County COVID-19 forgivable loan converted into a grant.

The Harris County COVID-19 Forgivable Loan program launched on April 9 to help the county’s small businesses stay open and maintain operating expenses. All \$10 million of the program’s funds were distributed as loans to 444 area small businesses by the summer of 2020. On Oct. 6, the H-GALDC received the county’s approval to convert the loans into grants.

Over the next two months, staff contacted each of the small business owners and worked with them to convert their loans to grants. The small businesses that had already begun paying back their loans have had their payments reimbursed by the county. The final loan conversion was completed on Nov. 30.

Dr. Randy Mitchmore, D.D.S., owner of the LifeSmiles by Dr. Randy Mitchmore dental office located in the Houston Museum District, had to close his practice of 42 years when the pandemic initially hit and stay at home orders were issued. He used the funds he received from the forgivable loan program primarily to keep his staff on

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payroll, allowing them the opportunity to do trainings and virtual seminars to maintain their skills.

“I was just ecstatic when I found out the loan was being converted into a grant,” said Mitchmore. “This whole experience has been an emotional roller coaster, but I’m extremely positive about the future. I’m proud to own a small business, and we have a direct impact on the local community. I’m also grateful for this program and that it was able to help small businesses as intended.”

“Right from the early days of COVID-19, Harris County recognized the likely impact of the emerging pandemic on our economy, and we immediately worked to address every possible risk we would face as a result of the pandemic, especially those experienced by folks that make up the heartbeat of our economy: small businesses,” said Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Adrian Garcia. “I am thrilled we were able to work with our partners at the Houston-Galveston Area Council to convert these loans into grants and give recipients one less concern.”

“H-GAC has been an excellent partner for this program, and their dedication in efficiently managing it has been phenomenal,” Garcia continued. “I like to say my office works hard for the hardworking people of Harris County, and it’s clear H-GAC takes that same approach with what they do. I am proud that many businesses were saved during the early peak of the pandemic and they remain open today.”

The Houston-Galveston Local Development Corporation supports economic development by providing low-cost, fixed-rate, government-guaranteed SBA 504 loans and other forms of financing to support new, existing, and expanding small businesses in the Houston-Galveston region. For more information about H-GALDC and its programs, visit HGALDC.com.

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