
Business consultant offers KEDC greeting to Yamaha

By Lisa Denton

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KEDC reached out and touched a Japanese corporation that owns a local manufacturer by asking a Texas-based international business consultant to visit with officials while on an overseas trip last month.

Amanda Nobles, KEDC executive director, said Tom Stellman, president/CEO of TIP Strategies, on KEDC's behalf called on officials at the Tokyo office of Yamaha Motor Co. LTD on Oct. 15. Yamaha Motor is the parent company of Yamaha Marine, owner of Skeeter Boats, which manufactures all of its boats in Kilgore. Skeeter had a major layoff earlier this year, with 45 losing their jobs.

She told directors that Stellman, who has done some planning work in the past for KEDC, praised Kilgore when he spoke at a recent economic development conference and discussed some of the problems rural communities have doing business in the international marketplace.

"Obviously, places like Houston and Dallas have more recognition internationally, but Tom, in his speech, noted Kilgore is a small city that has been effective in working with international companies," Nobles said. "After the conference, I asked if he could call on Yamaha since he was going to be there (in Japan) anyway. International companies, like everybody else, appreciate those outreaches. Everyone appreciates someone acknowledging their contribution.

"We wanted to let (Yamaha) know we know the economy has affected them as it has some of us," she said. "We wanted to express to them how much we appreciate their presence in Kilgore and how much we are behind them and are willing to assist in any way we can."

In a letter to KEDC, Stellman wrote: "We told them that Skeeter is an extremely important part of the community in Kilgore, and the Kilgore Economic Development Corporation would do its best to assist Skeeter."

They discussed the down economy and that "discretionary expenditures on boats and boat engines are among the first items consumers stop purchasing during a down economy. Unfortunately, Skeeter is no exception."

The Japanese businessmen said their company had also been forced to layoff some employees “and production has decreased to a minimum to keep its plants open.”

Stellman said he “also mentioned that economic growth in the past few decades has been concentrated in the South, particularly around Texas. Therefore, Skeeter, as a well-known bass boat brand, is located in a good location for the recovery.” Stellman presented Yamaha officials with a packet about KEDC and the city and presented them with “Kilgore star” paperweights.