



## **\$300,000 in grants to assist businesses**

**About 75 small local companies will be given technical assistance, consulting.**

By Barbara Correa, Staff Writer

Armed with more than \$300,000 in grants, the Valley Economic Development Center is coming to the rescue of small businesses in Canoga Park, Reseda and Winnetka.

With \$282,000 in federal grants secured by Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Sherman Oaks, plus \$25,000 from Citibank, the economic development group opened an office in Canoga Park last month for the West San Fernando Valley Business Revitalization Program.

The \$300,000 injection will pay for 20 hours of technical assistance and consulting to about 75 existing small companies, with the final goal being to add 50 to 60 jobs over the next two years, said Warren Cooley, director of business services at the VEDC.

"Our goal in life is to get businesses to create and sustain jobs. This program is unique in that we are providing to small existing businesses with growth potential," he said.

The organization has about 10 consultants who will work with the businesses, targeting ways to cut costs and stimulate growth.

Recommendations may include advice on marketing, payroll and rent, Cooley said.

"Are there things can be changed in pricing structure? Maybe you can reduce work hours, or bring in pay cuts to retain jobs," Cooley said.

"Another thing businesses do when times get tough is to cut off marketing, which is a mistake. The third thing to look at is see how much you're spending on rent. We can help with that."

One of the recipients of the consulting services is Window World Inc., in Chatsworth, which has been doing business in the San Fernando Valley since the early 1980s. But the latest economic downturn has challenged it like no other.

"We're in the home improvement business, so we are affected by the housing market," said Peter Cherney, owner of the company, which does textured coating, replacement doors and windows and patio coverings.

In response to the downturn, Cherney has had to lay off two of his 20 employees, switched from advertising in the Yellow Pages to marketing online, and started to tout his services as environmentally friendly.

He hired an optimization specialist who recommended he post coupons on the company Web site for discounts on coatings and replacement windows.

Cherney did that, but he said he is looking forward to sitting down with VEDC consultants and hearing what they have to say about how to improve.

"They're going to come in and sit down and give us their input on how we can be more successful," he said. "I'm excited."