

SEWING CRAFT – BUSINESS AND JOY



Wedding dresses sewing machine as a donation from CHF in Ljiljana Mihajlovic's working room



Ljiljana Mihajlovic working on the old sewing machine

ZAJECAR, SERBIA – For CHF's small Kick Start Program (KSP) grants competition, Ljiljana Mihajlovic sent a business plan for improving sewing wedding dresses business. Her idea was to improve the existing business by buying a new sewing machine for her studio. CHF supported her idea and, through USAID's Community Revitalization through Democratic Action (CRDA) Program, Ljiljana got funds to develop her business. From that moment much has changed in Ljiljana's life. Besides the new machine and more business clients, Ljiljana had an opportunity to participate in various workshops on business development. In these workshops Ljiljana came into contact with the Business Women Association from Belgrade and some other women who received KSP donations from CHF. She now works with them on starting a similar association in Timocki County, believing that this will develop a good economic environment and help other women to develop their business ideas. Ljiljana is Vice-president of Podvis Community Development Council (CDC). She spends half of her time in Podvis, working in the Council and sewing, and the rest in Knjazevac town where her shop and studio are situated and where she sells her products. Before this business, she worked as a construction site chief and civil engineering. During the 90's, when big firms started to collapse, Ljiljana

converted from construction to sewing and instead of big public firms, she chose her own initiative and started her own private business. For several years now, Ljiljana has run a shop for cutting and sewing of wedding dresses and evening gowns. So far, she has organized three fashion shows in Knjazevac and made costumes for several student and professional theater performances.

Ljiljana says that CHF's donation has helped her a lot. "CHF has helped me to renew the equipment I work with. Now I have two new machines. I work on the new one and I plan to soon hire at least one person to help me with my work".

The KSP has a particular importance in Timocki County where all big firms have either collapsed or are being shut down, people are out of work or have very small salaries. Through the KSP program CHF and USAID provide people with an opportunity to create jobs and earn more for themselves and their families.

Ljiljana Mihajlovic hopes that, thanks to the help she received from CHF and the future support of the business women association, her shop will grow into a big fashion studio for wedding dresses and formal women's fashion collections. "At the moment, I am preparing new models with the new equipment a have. I plan to make a fashion show of my wedding dresses and other models in Podvis as well".