

# BLACK ENTERPRISE

## Enterprise

MAKING IT

### Stitching on wheels

*Soft Stitch creates new twist in garment industry with mobile unit*

Rudy and Sharon Shepard have put a new spin on the embroidery business. By using a customized mobile trailer to service clients, the Shepards have increased revenues of their firm Soft Stitch, a six-year-old alterations and embroidery shop headquartered in Greensboro, North Carolina. Earnings in 1996 reached \$250,000.

Soft Stitch provides stitching on everything from T-shirts and hats to golf shirts and jackets. On any given day, Rudy Shepard loads his trailer with two stitching machines and a computer to make rounds to flea markets, boat and horse shows, and motorcycle rallies.

The shop is equipped with a four-head machine to handle large orders. However, using two single-head machines for stitching and a computer to configure patterns, Shepard provides on-the-spot embroidery for customers during his travels statewide.

"I wanted to be able to go out and get business and bring it back to the shop,"



Among the Shepards' clientele are AT&T and Procter & Gamble



says Shepard. "By being mobile, we can actually multiply our locations." He says it also adds credibility to the business since customers can see the work being done by Soft Stitch and not subcontractors.

Prices for embroidery vary according to the amount of stitching, but can cost as little as \$8 for one item. The Shepards, who accept large orders, can embroider as many as 500 items in a single order with a turnaround time of two weeks.

A jack of all trades, Shepard, 39, worked with an office cleaning business, a carpet cleaning company and car washing service before finally find-

ing success on wheels. In 1991, he and his wife, Sharon, 36, purchased a local alterations shop with \$30,000 obtained from bank loans, personal savings and partial financing from the shop's previous owners. After customer requests for embroidery,

the Shepards expanded their services and purchased their first embroidery machine.

As the business expanded, the Shepards moved their nine-employee firm to a 2,000-sq.-ft. space in 1995. They purchased additional embroidery machines and were soon taking orders from companies such as AT&T, Procter & Gamble and AMP, a manufacturer of adapters and connectors. "These days, that's where the bulk of our business is based—with corporations," says Shepard.

—Sonya Kimble-Ellis

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**Soft Stitch**  
**Rudy & Sharon Shepard, Owners**  
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