

Corbin company leading the way in the War on Terror

■ **By Dean Manning**

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One Corbin company is an integral part of the War on Terror.

Southeastern Kentucky Rehabilitation Industries, Inc., (SEKRI), which is based in the former Wal-Mart building on U.S. 25E, and also has facilities in Barbourville and Williamsburg, produces caps, hats, cold weather gear and first-aid kits for the U.S. military.

Stan Baker, purchasing and inventory manager for SEKRI told the members of Southern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce that while almost everyone in the region knows where SEKRI is located, few can accurately describe what the company does. "We get a lot of interesting comments," Baker said, noting people erroneously believe the company is a government agency. Baker said the company was founded in 1971 by the Corbin City Commission to aid Corbin High School students in attaining basic work skills. Workers initially staffed area soup kitchen and subcontracted work from nearby American Greeting.

In the mid 1980s, the company began producing the military equipment. Baker stressed the contract is not guaranteed to continue indefinitely, but it will continue so long as SEKRI can produce the equipment at a comprable cost to other manufacturers. "We have to be competitive with the commercial workplace, but we don't have to compete," Baker said.

Baker said the company employs more than 600 people, 400 of who are classified as "severely disabled."

Those disabilities go beyond physical, but Baker said they run the spectrum. "Those are 400 people that most people would not hire," Baker said.

"Everybody has ability, we just have to find it," Baker said.

To do that, engineers will design a system to allow the individual to work around his or her disability to be productive, be it sowing, assembling or packaging. As to funding, Baker said the company gets its money like any other company, by making and selling a product. All profit goes right back into the company.