

CALHOUN • COUNTY

Business

The Anniston Star | JULY 20, 2014



**STARTING
UP**

15

entrepreneurs
offer advice

CALHOUN COUNTY
Business

FROM THE EDITOR

Without startups and small businesses, the economy founders



Bob Davis

“You’ve got to have a roadmap to be successful.”

“Be prepared to work very hard.”

“Be willing to sacrifice.”

“Do what you’re good at and com-

mit yourself.”

“Find your niche and stick to it.”

Those are just some of the answers to a question we posed to the owners of 15 local businesses in this issue of Business Calhoun County. Our question: What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

We sensed a trend in the responses. Each owner we profiled in the following pages is committed to a vision and willing to work extremely hard to make it happen. Thus, this issue is dedicated to entrepreneurs, their dedication and their valuable contribution to our community’s economy. (For the record, businesses with 20 or fewer employees account for almost 90 percent of all U.S. jobs.)

Tom Peters, the U.S. author who has built a career on chronicling best business-practices, has kind words for men and women with an idea, a product to sell and the drive to bring it to customers. He

says they are key to improving the employment picture for the economy. Startups and new businesses “are going to pull us out of this mess.”

Peters’ advice for budding entrepreneurs isn’t all that different from what we heard from the business owners we spoke with.

“You’ve got to love it. You’ve got to be committed to it,” Peters said in a 2009 YouTube video on his website. “You’ve got to be willing to walk through fire.”

While a startup requires capital, taking out a huge loan isn’t the only option. You could “scrounge” enough money from friends and family to get the ball rolling, he said.

Flexibility is important. “You never get it right the first time. You never get it right the second time. You seldom get it right the 10th time. You’ve got to be willing to move around and hustle and so on,” Peters said.

And, he concluded, “If you’ve got an idea you’re in love with, go for it.”

Inside you’ll read about men and women doing just that. Our hope is that it might just add an extra bit of inspiration for the next person considering starting a business to build a better mousetrap.

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CHEAHA BREWING COMPANY

*Bringing something
new to town*

BY RYAN PHILLIPS

rphillips@annistonstar.com

Cheaha Brewing Co. has become a staple for craft beer lovers since the doors opened on Walnut Avenue in May 2013. For owner and Anniston native Rodney Snider, it's been good times ever since.

The company was born of a love of local food and craft beer. Snider and co-founder Rick Okins sought to bring something different to Calhoun County taste buds. To Snider, local ingredients mean local happiness.

With approximately 22 employees at any given time, the atmosphere is a quaint-yet-edgy take on the modern-day brewpub.

No trip to Cheaha is complete without sampling one of the signature beverages, brewed fresh just feet away from the expansive dining area.

Snider's personal favorite is the heather ale. This lighter brew is made possible by incorporating heather tips and local honey from Eastaboga Bee Co., which Snider said reiterates the mission of Cheaha Brewing.

► **What is the best thing you did?**

The thing I'm the most proud of is the fact that we brought something new and different to the area. We have a unique business model as far as what we want to do, and how we want to bring new things to the public. Like the use of local produce, because we really strive to incorporate other businesses within our business.

► **What would you have done differently?**

Hindsight is always 20/20. There are definitely things I would have done different, but overall I am happy with where we are at. What I would have done different is business-related or equipment-related, but the great thing about it is that you have to be agile and figure out how to change that. There are 1,001 different ways to skin a cat, so they say.

► **What was the hardest part?**

Learning how to manage your time. I was a professional and had been in corporate settings for the better part of 17 years, and it's a whole lot different. Even though you are focused [in a corporate setting], you can go home and forget about it. In a situation like this, you are 100 percent dedicated.

► **What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?**

Plan, plan and plan. Then take it slow. When we set out to do this, it was a very detailed plan we developed and we based everything off of that. As a matter of fact, the name of our project plan was called 'Baby Steps,' because progress happens in small, little chunks.



Rodney Snider of Cheaha Brewing Co.

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CHRISTIAN CORNER MEATS

Drawing on the expertise of others

BY ZAC AL-KHATEEB

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Debbie Young and her husband, David, started Christian Corner Meats in 2009, but have owned the shopping center it stands on since 1994. For 15 years, the Youngs collected rent from the previous owners of Anniston Quality Meats – until April 2009, when that company went out of business.

For four months, the Youngs tried to find someone who would open up any kind of store where the butchery once stood. After months of fruitless searching, the Youngs decided they would reopen the business – despite having no experience in the meat industry.

The Youngs wanted to supplement the rent they had lost from the previous owners, and decided an empty store in the shopping center – a “nothing hole” – looked bad for surrounding businesses.

The Youngs took great pains to improve the shop, spending several thousand dollars putting new asphalt in the parking lot, repainting the walls, putting in new flooring and lights as well as cleaning out the cases.

When they reopened the business after five months, they hired 25 employees, including three full-time butchers who shared their passion for doing good work.

The shop mainly sells meat products, but also sells seafood, breakfast foods, vegetables and meats smoked in the back of the store.

► What’s the best thing you did?

Cleaned it up, and gave it a different look. Because we wanted to do some of the same type stuff, but we wanted to do it an extra degree. So before, they had one butcher here, and they did a lot of repackaging. Most of the meat was cut at another location ... We just took it up a notch.

► Would you have done anything differently?

No. First thing we did was to get people who knew the business. And the people that did the floor, we took somebody that knew how to do flooring. People that did refrigeration, we got people that knew how to do refrigeration. People that worked in the meat business, we got people who knew how to do the meat business. So we had to learn quickly, but we drew on their knowledge.

► What was the hardest part?

When we first started, getting the right staff was the hardest part. One that shared the same mindset that we had ... somebody that comes in there and wants to come in there and do a good job and have pride in it.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

Work hard, and be willing to sacrifice. ... And if it makes money, give back to the community.



Debbie Young, co-owner of Christian Corner meats.

Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

Autumn Cove

Retirement Community



My devotional message today was titled “New Strength for a New Day”

When my mom fell on Thanksgiving and had to endure months of recovery, she and I talked about the possibilities for a change in living arrangements.

We discussed assisted living and weighed the pros and cons. We had an opportunity to visit, tour and dine at Autumn Cove. We were impressed with the attractive facility, the uniquely landscaped grounds, the elegant dining area and the friendly, skilled and compassionate staff at all levels.

Many longtime friends and acquaintances were already residents there and we met new people with common interests.

Mother was able to “try out” a furnished apartment and then choose her own [apartment] which we furnished with her furniture.

She is “at home” here and stays very busy.

The staff, facility and grounds at Autumn Cove are beautiful in every way just like my mom. How perfect is that!

— June Land Reaves

My mom was a very independent person and when she moved here from Tuscaloosa she wanted to live alone. That worked for about two years. Then..... she knew and I knew that we needed help.

I began to look at a couple of places and when I looked at Autumn Cove, I knew that it was the correct place for us. She's at home here. She receives excellent care here.

It's been a wonderful five years for us.

We know our family could not make it without it and we appreciate all the wonderful care we've gotten.

— Ellen Bass



Autumn Cove Staff,

Your compassion, understanding and kindness has been such a blessing during the time that my mother has been at Autumn Cove. You will never know how much that it has meant to me to watch you all take care of her and display so much grace and love.

Her journey through Alzheimer's has taken many turns but with each new challenge. I know that you have always went above and beyond and provided the very best care that she could ever receive. I have watched her regain so many things that truly brought her joy and happiness. From her beloved bus rides, to joining in the singing and participating in the crafts..... For a brief time, Alzheimer's was no longer visible, she was back to being a young girl and just enjoying life.

I know that you all were a part of God's Plan in our lives. Your professionalism is evident, but your grace, compassion, kindness and understanding will never be forgotten.

Sincerely,
Denise White

My mother was a resident of Autumn Cove for almost two years. During her stay she lived in the assisted living section and in the special needs section....

Because I had almost daily contact with my mother during her stay I was able to see first hand the type of care Autumn Cove residents receive.

What I saw gave me tremendous relief and peace of mind. The care she received was remarkably efficient and was always provided with great care, patience and professionalism.

The entire experience was far and away beyond all of my original expectations.

Anyone with a loved one in need of assisted living or special needs such as Alzheimer's, dementia or a physical disability should seriously consider Autumn Cove as a choice for this all important decision

— Todd Caldwell



Autumn Cove is the answer to my prayers and the solution to the needs of my mom and aunt. I have the responsibility for both of these wonderful women and they require very different care.

The staff at Autumn Cove has been quick to diagnose their problems and find solutions. They have an uncanny way of seeing the senior as an individual and discovering the perfect way to meet their needs.

The care of a senior loved one is a great responsibility and was overwhelming for me. I searched for answers and sought advice from experts for some time before deciding on Autumn Cove. I can honestly say I believe that placing my mom and aunt at Autumn Cove is one of the best decisions I have made in my life. Each night when I close my eyes I know that they are safe and happy.

— Deborah Lowry

We checked out retirement homes all the way from Kentucky to Atlanta to Jacksonville, Piedmont and then in Anniston.

This was our favorite place. She receives all the services that I thought she would miss in a private home.

She adapted very fast to this lovely resort life that she has here now.

The best thing for me is that I've gained a family here at Autumn Cove.

My mother is thrilled with the attention.... This is where you need to come for that final point in your life when you have earned a vacation and a resort.

— Maggie Aderholdt



POINTERS MENSWEAR

*Filling a niche
in a college town*

BY LAURA GADDY

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Renae Phillips opened Pointers Menswear on Jacksonville's Public Square in March.

The clothing store sells American-made brands and caters to college-aged men who attend Jacksonville State University. Shoppers can find T-shirts in faded hues, button-down shirts, koozies, hats and stickers.

Phillips said she opened the store at the recommendation of her grandson, Kyle Reeves, a recent Jacksonville High School graduate who thought there were too few clothing options in Jacksonville for men.

Phillips relies on a staff of five part-time staff members, all JSU students. She also employs her daughter, who works as a full-time manager for the store.

.....

► **What's the best thing you did?**

I have a good staff. They seem to be vested in the store, and they're creative.

► **What would you have done differently?**

I honestly didn't realize how much work was involved.

► **What was the hardest part?**

The difficulty is trying to figure out merchandising. When you're just starting out, a lot of these vendors that sell the types of brands you want in the store ... are kind of hesitant.

► **What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?**

You have to go kind of slow. You have to take it one day at a time.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Renae Phillips inside her store Pointers on the square in Jacksonville.

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GROWING TRENDS

Working within a budget

BY TIM STEERE

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Inspired by a friend's Chattanooga children's consignment shop, sisters-in-law Ashley Martin and Abby Bass in 2013 opened Growing Trends, a children's and maternity consignment store, at 11 E. 10th St. in downtown Anniston.

Martin said she'd always had the idea for a children's consignment shop in the back of her mind, but the conditions were just right.

"We were excited about the new mayor and City Council being elected and just felt like it was a good time to be involved in something," said Martin.

For Bass, the opportunity to become business partners with Martin came at a perfect time, as the then-stay-at-home mother was ready to re-enter the workforce.

The store offers clothing, toys and accessories such as car seats and strollers.

Growing Trends also provides displays of local artists' work designed specifically for children. Bass and Martin have expanded their services to include birthday events featuring art parties guided by an instructor.

► What's the best thing you did?

Abby Bass: We did a lot of research, stuck to a budget, a very tight budget, and we were successful because we did a lot of the work ourselves. We searched and found good deals on stuff, so that was probably our best decision – to stick to a budget.

► What would you have done differently?

Ashley Martin: I think if we had a bigger budget, we would've done more advertising-wise and stuff like that. But I think for what we had, we did exactly what we could do.

► What was the hardest part?

AB: Probably just the labor of getting everything together and just getting started. It took us three or four months of planning, painting, sorting items and getting everything together. There's of course a lot of steps you go through like insurance and all kinds of stuff that you have to set up.

AM: For me it would be getting enough inventory to make it look like it was a full store. We sent out mailers to different groups that we knew to try and get people to come in with items.

AB: Processing takes a while. We work together to sort the items and price them. We have a software system that helps us with the barcodes and the pricing. It takes a few days just to get one person's stuff through the system.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

AM: Ask a lot of questions. Talk to as many different people as you can. We knew enough to know that we didn't know anything, so we went to professionals for every step of it.

AB: If you've never done it before, everything's new. You can easily get duped into things that are not necessary.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Ashley Martin of Growing Trends puts a baby quilt on a bed at her shop in Anniston.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Abby Bass of Growing Trends puts children's clothes on a rack at her shop in Anniston.

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CHEAHA CHEER AND TUMBLE

Giving back to the community

BY ELIZABETH LOWDER

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In just under two years, Cheaha Cheer and Tumble has gone from teaching six students to an award-winning competitive cheerleading gym with more than 200 clients.

Founder Allie Mitchell has been involved in the cheerleading industry since age 14, participating on a collegiate squad and serving as a coach.

“When I got into the workforce after college, I realized I missed being involved in cheerleading business and missed working with kids,” she said.

Founded in 2012, Cheaha Cheer and Tumble teaches students as young as 18 months old.

Cheaha Cheer and Tumble was named the 2014 Emerging Small Business of the Year at the annual Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce Small Business Awards Gala this spring.

The 8,000 square-foot facility in Golden Springs offers a variety of group and private classes. It’s also a popular spot for hosting birthday parties. With seven part-time coaches in addition to her husband, John, Mitchell has introduced cheer culture to the community in a fun way.

► What’s the best thing you did?

I think the best thing so far has been the general growth of the business. Neither John nor I are from this area, and we’ve been welcomed by the community, a lot of support from families, as well as businesses and schools.

► What would you have done differently?

Worry less and not lose as much sleep over the little things. I feel like we’ve made some pretty sound decisions, well thought out and well prayed about.

► What was the hardest part?

Getting our building squared away. It was a very long process, just one of those things where it took forever. Getting plans laid out for the building and getting the process rolling between talking to contractors.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

Get involved in the community, you know, it’s easy to forget because you’re so busy and any down time you have you want to be at home doing things for yourself personally. You just need to make an effort to be involved in other community groups and nonprofits. It helps get your name out there, and helps you build relationships with other people you wouldn’t necessarily interact with.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Allie Mitchell watches students at Cheaha Cheer and Tumble.



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REMODELER'S OUTLET

Weathering the recession

BY ELIZABETH MANNING

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Remodeler's Outlet in Anniston doesn't only offer the materials needed for a renovation, it provides the inspiration, too. Windows, doors, countertops and more line the walls at the outlet.

The store works with local and regional architects to provide a full set of services to both local and commercial builders and private buyers.

Starting a small business is a step-by-step process, said owner Clayton Angell.

Angell, an Anniston native, started the business in 1997, operating originally out of a 5,000-square-foot warehouse in west Anniston.

In 1999, Angell moved the business to a building south of downtown Anniston on Noble Street.

"We had double-digit growth until 2007, when the recession hit," Angell said.

From 2007 to 2008, the outlet lost 60 percent of its usual business, leading Angell to lay off 30 employees. However, through large commercial projects and the loyal business of local builders, the business has gradually made its way back, Angell said.

In 2013, through loans from the city of Anniston and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Angell remodeled the

store and increased the floor space of the door shop by 50 percent. The entire facility is now 71,000 square feet, according to Angell. The business now boasts 25 full-time employees.

Angell said the outlet sells to local builders whenever possible, but the majority of his work goes to commercial builders statewide. Approximately 20 percent of his business is private buyers, 25 percent is local builders and commercial companies make up the rest.

"Commercial builders are the reason I am still in business," Angell said.

► **What's the best thing you did?**

Our company supplied materials for 27 houses for Jimmy Carter's Habitat for Humanity in west Anniston. That was a feel-good project.

► **What would you have done differently?**

Not start the business — but I'm glad I did it anyway. I would have twice as much capital as I thought I needed, which is something I didn't do.

► **What was the hardest part?**

The collections process is the most

difficult part of being an entrepreneur. Especially with the nature of my particular business, you sell the materials, and then you have to continually hassle customers to settle bills. Some customers are great and pay up on time, every time, though.

► **What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?**

Be prepared to work very hard, all the time, and surround yourself with smart people who are willing to work just as hard as you do.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Clayton Angell, right, looks over blueprints with Cyndi Warf at Remodeler's Outlet in Anniston.



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The Civilian Marksmanship Program, based in Anniston, continues to grow, thanks to the support of the local community, junior ROTC and club participation from across the country. Our indoor airgun range in Anniston and twin facility at Camp Perry, Ohio, are home to multiple air rifle and air pistol events throughout the year and each features expert instruction and state-of-the-art targetry and scoring equipment.

State-of-the-art also describes the CMP's new Talladega Marksmanship Park located about two miles from the super speedway off I-20. The new shooting park will feature all-electronic scoring on its 600-yard highpower rifle range and 100-yard sight-in range. In addition, the park, scheduled to open in May 2015, offers multiple action and service pistol ranges, a 15-station sporting clays course, a trap field with five-stand overlay and a 13,000-square-foot clubhouse that will house lounges, classrooms and a retail store.

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PIPER'S PLAYHOUSE

*Paying attention
to customers*

BY BROOKE CARBO

bcarbo@annistonstar.com

When Sara Hare and her husband, Eric, moved to Calhoun County in 2009, the Illinois native immediately saw a need. With five rescue dogs at home and no doggie daycare in sight, Hare decided to take matters into her own hands.

Piper's Playhouse, named after the couple's 9-year-old Jack Russell terrier, opened its doors in April 2011, offering daycare, grooming and boarding services.

"Boarding goes hand in hand with doggie daycare," explained Hare. "That way, while their owners are away, dogs get a vacation too."

Last year, the business made the move from Saks to downtown Anniston, taking over the old Alagasco building on Noble Street. The new digs have given Hare the space needed to grow her business.

The daycare facility has been upgraded to a 2,500-square-foot indoor play park, and a loading zone on Noble keeps four-legged clients safe coming and going.

The shop's retail selection has also expanded, as well as available services. The staff of 15 now includes an onsite certified trainer, making Piper's Playhouse, as Hare said, "a convenient one-stop shop for pet parents."

► What's the best thing you did?

The best thing is just to listen to the customers. We tailor our services to each individual pet to make sure each pet and pet owner has everything they need. So the pets who are a little anxious get the extra time they need being comforted; pets with more energy get extra playtime. Our customers know we care about their pets — they're not just another profit.

► What would you have done differently?

I would definitely have done more research on what works, what doesn't work. For instance, I should have gotten the better turf for the pets (in the indoor play park). We initially went for the more economical solution, but we should have done more research. We're in the process of switching over now to one that offers better support.

► What was the hardest part?

One thing we had trouble with was finding employees who didn't just want to play with dogs all day, who understood all the work that goes into the job. For instance, working here involves a lot of cleaning — everyone who works here, from manager to daycare worker, is going to be cleaning.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

Do your research, and do not commit to anything until you know what you're committing to.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Georgia McRae watches as dogs have a big time playing in the play area of Piper's Playhouse Doggie Daycare on Noble Street in Anniston.

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STILL MID-TOWN CERAMICS

Saved by a move to bigger, better location

BY TAYLOR MANNING

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When Tammy and Keith Katz founded Still Mid-Town Ceramics in 2004, they wanted it to have a “homey” atmosphere that welcomed both novice and experienced artists — and their pets, of course.

Customers browse merchandise at the shop on Noble Street alongside the Katz family pets, a 100-pound tortoise named E.T. and a bandanna-clad dog named Harvey. Visitors can peruse paints, brushes and other supplies before heading over to an area with mismatched chairs and worn tables to begin working.

Tammy, 52, grew up crafting ceramics in her grandmother’s art studio. She eventually decided to quit her job as a dental hygienist to pursue a lifelong passion for art, said her husband Keith, 58. The couple purchased Mid-Town Ceramics, which had been closed for two years after the death of its previous owner, Ed Scott. The shop reopened under the name “Still Mid-Town Ceramics.”

The store contains thousands of clay figures, and customers can learn techniques for painting them. Classes in pottery-making and canvas painting are also offered.

As the shop’s only full-time employee, Tammy gets help from her husband and six volunteers who work on a part-time basis. She said that most of the volunteers are repeat customers who became close friends over time.

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► **What’s the best thing you did?**

Keith Katz: We moved to Noble Street. We were off South Quintard Avenue on L Street, and business wasn’t good there. There was no flow of traffic at all. It was either move or shut down.

Tammy Katz: We had outgrown the building. It was the best thing we could’ve done.

► **What was the hardest part?**

KK: Moving 5,000 molds, plus all of our supplies.

► **What would you have done differently?**

TK: We should have moved originally. If we’d have done it all in the beginning before we started to grow, it would’ve been an easier task in the long run.

► **What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?**

KK: Be financially prepared, and be ready to commit a lot of time.

TK: Find your niche and stick to it. If you don’t enjoy it, don’t do it. I’ve been doing ceramics since I was 6 years old. This is just part of my life.



Still Midtown Ceramics owners Keith and Tammy Katz.

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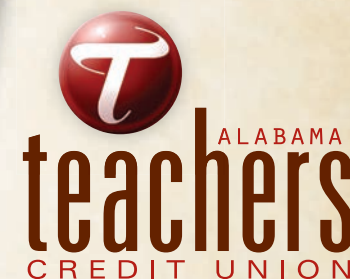
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CUTZ & STYLEZ

*Following a dream,
despite obstacles*

BY EDDIE BURKHALTER

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Xenay Tillman wanted to do something for his hometown several years ago, so he moved back and opened up shop.

Tillman, 39, moved from Jacksonville to cut hair in Georgia, but decided in 2007 that his hometown needed a barber shop. He opened Cutz & Stylez, now located at 205 Pelham Road.

Boosted by business from students at Jacksonville State University, Tillman's shop did so well that he decided to open another location in Anniston in 2010. Both shops now employ eight workers, many of whom are felons who can find it difficult to get jobs after release from prison. Tillman wanted to make that task easier for them, he said.

The shops, which cater to African-Americans, offer a wide range of services, from traditional haircuts to weaves, extensions, braids and hair coloring.

.....

► **What is the best thing you did?**

Finding the right location and investing in myself. It's been a blessing ever since.

► **What would you have done differently?**

I had a shop across the street from Quintard Mall. I probably would have kept that one.

► **What was the hardest part?**

I had to get a lawyer when opening my shop in Jacksonville, because we weren't welcomed by other local business owners. Regardless, we're still there.

► **What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?**

It was a dream to have a business of my own, so I would tell them to follow their dreams. Blacks have car washes and barber shops, but we don't have many other businesses. Let's aspire to have more.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Xenay Tillman, owner of Cutz and Stylez in Jacksonville, cuts hair.

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MONET SALON AND DAY SPA

*Rejuvenating an
existing business*

BY LAURA CAMPER

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Monet Salon and Day Spa at 328 E. Blue Mountain Road in Anniston has been in business for about 12 years, said Kim Pritchett, the current owner.

Pritchett started out as an esthetician at the spa, doing facials and such. Three years ago, the owner, Chae Mi Madden, offered to sell her the business, Pritchett said. She bought the spa and fulfilled a lifelong dream.

"I always wanted to be my own boss," Pritchett said.

Pritchett and Monet's seven employees do hair, nails, facials and skin care, massage and permanent makeup tattoos in the 16,500-square-foot salon.

"We offer everything here they could get in a larger city," Pritchett said.

Emily Duncan, public relations coordinator for the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce, noted that Pritchett bought the spa and rejuvenated it. She listened to her customers and provided the services they wanted and needed.

▶ **What's the best thing you did?**

Giving employees opportunities.

▶ **What would you have done differently?**

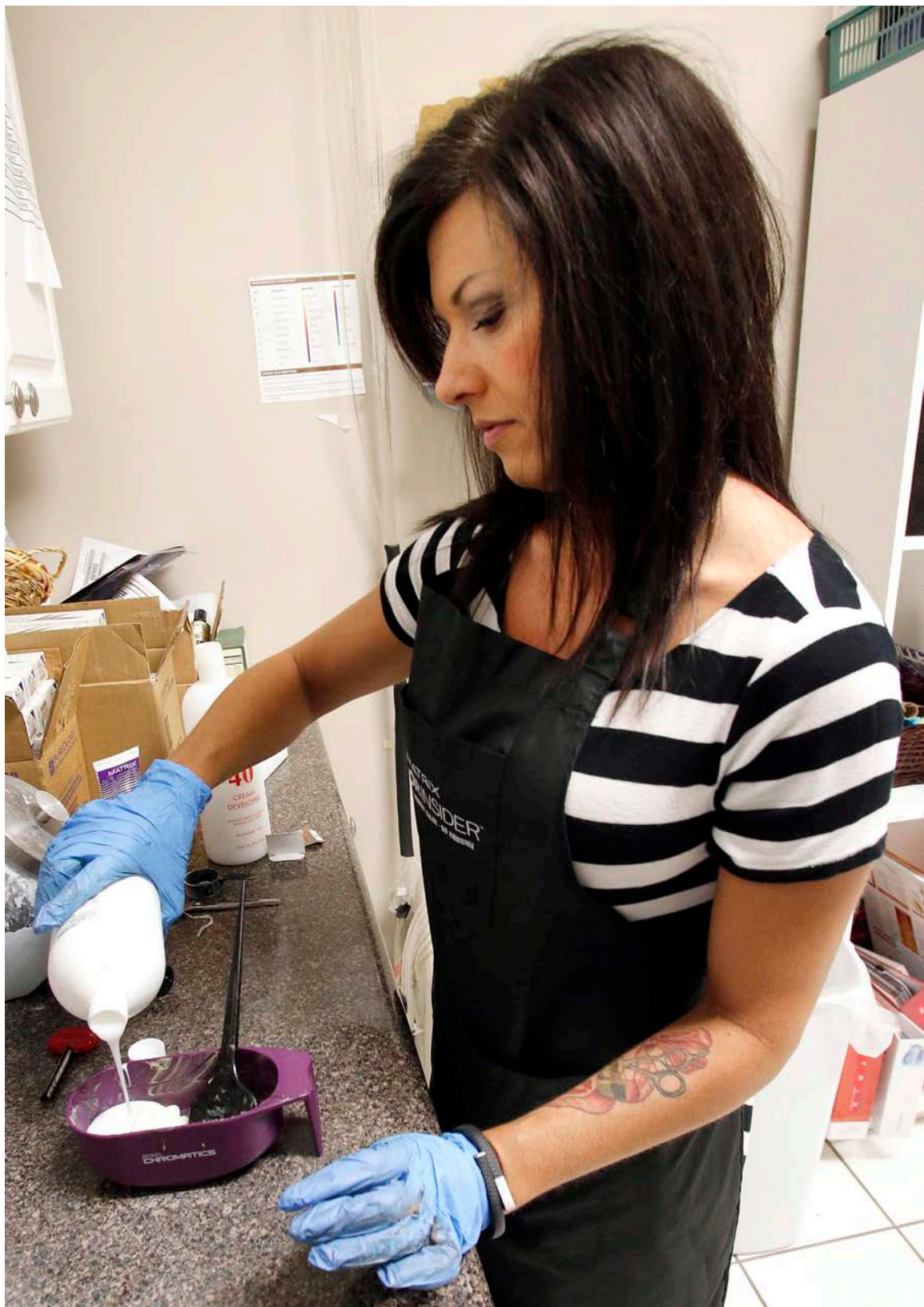
Probably would have gotten more input from employees on how they would run their own business.

▶ **What is the hardest part?**

Juggling your personal life with your business. With Facebook, people contact me all hours of the day and night.

▶ **What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?**

Start small and go slow.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Kim Pritchett mixes hair color for a client's hair at Monet Salon and Day Spa in Anniston.

CHEVALIER PRODUCTIONS

*Finding a new outlet
for old skills*

BY BRIAN ANDERSON

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For John Chevalier, finding work as a professional musician was tough. Providing services to working musicians, though, was a little more manageable.

In 1991, Chevalier, who was trying to make a living as a drummer, decided to hang up the sticks for a while and get into show business behind the scenes. Today, Chevalier Productions, on G Street in Anniston, is a company dedicated to providing stage equipment for musicians, from audio production to lighting.

"I wasn't making much money," Chevalier recalled recently with a laugh. "But I had all the equipment; I knew how to put on a show. I said, 'Why not?'"

Since then, Chevalier said, his company has found success all over the state and beyond. He said he regularly hires crews to help him out in Birmingham and Atlanta most weekends, and he hasn't been a stranger to four- or five-hour treks to reach a destination.

The nature of the job means employment fluctuates, Chevalier said. He has a full-time employee to help out at the G Street location, which offers retail sales of equipment as well as drum, guitar and bass lessons. Crews to help him work shows can range up to six people, he said.

► What's the best thing you did?

Just being able to provide professional services for musicians in the area. I'm really proud of that.

► What would you have done differently?

I would have borrowed a lot more money sooner.

► What was the hardest part?

The hours. This weekend I had four shows in Atlanta and Birmingham. As soon as you're done with one, you have to pack up and get back on the road. I never get any sleep.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

Plan well and be able to learn on the fly. Nobody told me how to run a business, I just had to keep learning.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

John Chevalier checks out a sound board at his business, Chevalier Productions in Anniston.

WASHIN' COIN LAUNDRY

*Paying attention to
business cycles*

BY LAURA MONROE

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In 2010, Ken Barrett founded Washin' Coin Laundry Anniston in a location that had been a laundromat years before. With only two months between the day he received the building permit and opening day, Barrett completely remodeled and renovated the space on Quintard Avenue.

"We've been running good and steady since then," Barrett said. "The first customer that ever walked in the door, I still see him here every once and a while, so we have a loyal following, too."

It wasn't too long before he was ready to expand, and Barrett opened Washin' Coin Attalla the following October, then Washin' Coin Golden Springs in January.

While the first two locations are self-serve, the Golden Springs location, on Greenbrier Dear Road, offers drop-off service as well. That location employs three people.

► What's the best thing you did?

The best advice I can offer is to do your research and understand who your target market is. It might not be who you think it is. Another big thing is to work out a business plan. You also want someone who understands business to review your plan.

► What would you have done differently?

I think the biggest thing was just to factor in the ramp-up speed. It's going to take people a few months to find your business so you have to have the capital in place to support your business. For those first few months, you almost want to project no income. If any money comes in, great. It's a bonus.

► What was the hardest part?

Understanding the cycling was one of the hardest parts. We have what they call spring and fall bump where everybody is cleaning and getting new clothes. You'll have those and think 'Hey, all my marketing is paying off.' Then it drops down the next month. After you have been in business for a few years, you can anticipate those cycles because you can see the trend.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

Find a mentor. Your mentor doesn't have to be in the same industry. There is basic business stuff that is going to work in any business. Similar would be best, but you just need someone who is willing to say, 'No, I don't think this is going to work.' The other thing is to make sure you have a good accountant and you understand all of your taxes because they just keep coming up.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Ken Barrett checks on one of his washing machines at the Washin' Anniston Coin Laundry on Quintard Avenue in Anniston.

MOORE PRINTING COMPANY

Navigating in a changing market

BY ZACH TYLER

Special to The Star

Danny Shears and Steve Taylor had no experience with printing presses when they bought Moore Printing Co. from a business broker in 2001, but they never doubted success. They hoped they could learn a thing or two from the three employees who came with the company.

Even though there isn't as much printing as there used to be – Shears blames the “computer age” for a sharp decline in copy work – it's still been “a real good 13 years.” Taylor says that the move to digital copying has made Moore Printing faster and more efficient, too.

The owners – friends since childhood – say their company has grown while other printing companies have dried up thanks to the way they do business. “We thought if we deliver a quality product at a fair price in a timely matter, people would do business with us and stay loyal, and they have,” said Shears.

Moore Printing employs seven people, including Taylor and Shears, and prints business cards, brochures, forms and invitations for clients like B.R. Williams Trucking Co., the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, and The Anniston Star. It celebrated its 35th anniversary this year, and has never moved from its location on Gurnee Avenue.

► What's the best thing you did?

Danny Shears: I would say, letting our employees know we appreciate them. Because happy employees are the best salespeople you could ever have.

► What would you have done differently?

Steve Taylor: We might have tried to expand into different markets.

DS: But as things worked out, if we had expanded then and the recession hit, we could've opened a business and then closed it and had to come back here, which is always a negative.

► What was the hardest part?

ST: Once we got past the learning curve, the difficult part was hiring the right people. As any employer will tell you, they make mistakes along the way with hiring. We've had to make some changes along the way.

DS: And that's hard, when you have to let somebody go, and you know they have a family and bills, and this is their livelihood. That's very hard when you're making that decision.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

ST: You've got to have a roadmap to be successful, and then you've got to follow that plan. You've got to do plenty of research to know that your plan will be effective, and then you've got to execute that plan to be successful. Sometimes that means depending on resources from other folks to make business decisions, like knowing the market is viable for the service you're trying to sell.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Co-owners of Moore Printing are Danny Shears, left, and Steve Taylor.

BOOZER LAMINATED BEAM CO.

Reinventing an 80-year-old company

BY BILL EDWARDS

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Boozer Laminated Beam Co. was founded in the 1930s by Elbert Boozer and Hinton Boozer as a lumber company. In the 1960s, William Owsley oversaw the transition of the company to a manufacturer of laminated timber products.

Laminated timber is a building product composed of long strips of wood joined and glued together to form a beam that is stronger and more versatile than an ordinary log.

The process originated in Europe, said Bud Owsley, the company's owner, president and CEO for the past 15 years. The resultant engineered wood allows a builder to do "more work with less wood," he said. The product is typically used in residential structures.

With a manufacturing plant and offices on Crawford Avenue in Anniston, providing jobs to 35 highly skilled and motivated workers, the company has always called west Anniston home.

► What's the best thing you did?

I made the decision to partner with almighty God so that he guides my steps in how to run the company.

Surrounded myself with smart, talented individuals who were hungry to make a difference.

► What would you have done differently?

Nothing.

► What was the hardest part?

The lack of mechanization and automation. What you saw, I dreamed about when I first came to work here.

► What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?

It is essential that you be creative and passionate about your career. Passion is what fuels the engine to make a commitment to excellence. Passion helps you learn what your capabilities are.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Bud Owsley, owner of Boozer Beam, oversees the production process at his plant in Anniston.

PINNACLE RESEARCH GROUP

Finding the right market

BY PATRICK MCCRELESS

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Darin and Tracy Sims were only supposed to be in Anniston five years.

The Georgia high-school sweethearts - turned married couple and then business partners - opened Pinnacle Research Group on 10th Street in September 1998 on a five-year plan to try their hands in the medical research business. They expected to move to a larger market later. But success kept the Simses in Anniston and, after 16 years, the company is still going strong.

Tracy Sims had previously opened a medical research company in Atlanta. However, she and her husband decided to open a similar business in Anniston because the Atlanta market had become oversaturated.

Pinnacle Research, which employs 17 people, provides research and testing on prescription drugs before they are introduced into the market. Pinnacle helps pharmaceutical companies test drugs for a wide variety of diseases and conditions, from diabetes to arthritis.

► **What is the best thing you did?**

Darin Sims: Picking the physicians and our location. We work with a great group of physicians that oversee our studies.

► **What would you have done differently?**

DS: I don't think we would have done anything differently.

► **What was the hardest part?**

DS: Convincing people that know nothing about you to agree and put their reputation at stake to work with you.

Tracy Sims: Also, there were a lot of people in the community who were not open-minded to participating. It was hard getting the trust of local physicians and gaining the trust of their patients.

► **What advice would you give a budding entrepreneur?**

DS: Do what you do well, and do it better than other people. You can only lose your reputation once.

TS: Do what you're good at and commit yourself. Our business never would have worked if we'd hired other people to manage it and didn't oversee it. You have to stay engaged.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Tracy Sims of Pinnacle Research prepares a sample to load into a testing machine.

So you want to start a business?

Three local resources for budding entrepreneurs

BY DANIEL GADDY

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JSU Small Business Development Center

"A lot of people don't know about us," said Kenneth Grissom, program coordinator for Jacksonville State University's Small Business Development Center.

The center, which opened in 1983, is part of the Small Business Administration. JSU's program serves seven counties and is one of seven development centers in Alabama.

The center helps emerging business owners craft business and financial plans. It also has four coaches, each specializing in a particular field. For example, Grissom said, he has a food-service background, and he often helps aspiring restaurateurs navigate the hurdles of the industry.

The center can also help businesses gather the documentation and prerequisites needed to become a supplier to the federal government.

Grissom said people are often surprised to know the services from the center are free.

"It's never about the money with us," he said. "It's hopefully about helping our clients."

And once a business becomes a client of JSU's Development Center, it remains one.

"We have clients that have been in operation for 25 years," he said.

The center frequently hosts seminars and training sessions for businesses.

For more information on the JSU Small Business Development Center, visit www.jsusbdc.com.

North East Alabama Entrepreneurial Systems

Once an aspiring business owner has a business plan together, there's the issue of office space.

That's where the nonprofit North East Alabama Entrepreneurial Systems can help.

According to operations manager Jennifer Williamon, the organization is a business incubator, providing office space, technology and light manufacturing space to local start-ups.

Williamon said the emerging businesses have access to phones, scanners, copiers and presentation equipment — all of which is included as part of their rent. The organization charges about \$1 per square foot for office space, and about 28 cents per square foot for light manufacturing space.

Williamon said having access to all the equipment means the companies can better spend their startup capital.

"The idea is we help them accelerate their business," she said, adding that an incubator gives owners the opportunity to tweak their business model before investing in their own offices.

Anniston's incubator also serves as an office for SCORE, a nonprofit that started in the 1980s to offer free advice to local entrepreneurs. Anniston SCORE is part of a nationwide network of more than 13,000 volunteer mentors.

NEAES also hosts regular seminars and training sessions open to business people throughout the area.

According to Williamon, five of the organization's companies have won the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce's small business award.

Williamon said NEAES started in 1998 as a result of the closure of Fort McClellan. A grant from the federal Economic Development Administration, along with a match from local municipalities, established the incubator.

She said 80 percent of the group's

operating revenue comes from rent paid by the startups. The remainder is provided by contributions from municipalities such as the Calhoun County Commission and the city of Oxford.

For more information about the incubator, visit www.neaes.org or call 256-831-5215. To schedule an appointment with SCORE, call 256-831-5215.

'Shark Tank' Calhoun County

Some up-and-coming companies may have the right financial plan and business model, but might be missing that other little ingredient: money.

A group of investors and advisors in Calhoun County hope to connect those companies with seasoned business people who have the capital and the nerve to bet on local entrepreneurs.

John Wheeler, a local retired bank president, started organizing the group, called Advanced Capital Entrepreneur System, in 2012.

It's modeled after ABC's "Shark Tank" TV series, in which several venture capitalists hear a presentation from an emerging business.

ACES chairman John Blue said the investors who participate in the program agree to invest a minimum of \$100,000 to entrepreneurs with whom they sign on. There's no maximum, he said.

"When people have skin in the game, they seem to work harder on both sides," he said.

The list of investors includes Dick Anderson with Huron Valley Steel Corp., Kerry Holt from NobleBank and Trust, and Robert Jackson from The Anniston Star.

Each applicant is vetted by Lindsay Ward, director of business development for the Calhoun County Economic Development Council. Each entrepreneur must provide detailed information about his or her company's sales, income and previous investments.

Blue said by the time an entrepreneur makes it to speak with ACES investors, he and Ward are confident the company is worthy of the investors' time.

Ward said people would be amazed at the inventors and businesses taking root in Calhoun County.

"I've seen everything, and that's the beauty of it," she said.

Even if a business owner doesn't get an investor after presenting to ACES, Ward said, that person has still gained valuable feedback about his or her company and made powerful business connections.

Blue said the investors offer more than money, providing valuable guidance in dealing with issues like OSHA standards, EPA regulations and making payroll.

"Those are the kind of relationships you don't forget — when someone reaches out and believes in you," he said.



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CLOCKING OUT | TIM LOCKETTE

Thoughts on entrepreneurship, as illustrated by Boy Scouts



Tim Lockette

I've been looking at merit badges a lot lately, because my son is a Boy Scout, and has hit that age. I'm fascinated with merit badges — an ingenious way to trick kids into taking academic courses.

They're solid courses, too. The manual for the journalism badge covers stuff we learn and re-learn every day in the newsroom. The aviation and wilderness survival badge manuals teach nearly everything I learned in two months of rather unpleasant Air Force training.

It occurs to me that if I got my son to do the entrepreneurship badge — or did the course myself — I'd be far ahead of most journalists who write about business. To get the badge, you have to do all sorts of stuff journalists have never done. To wit:

- ▶ "In your own words, define entrepreneurship."
- ▶ "Think of as many ideas for businesses as you can, and write them down."
- ▶ "Create a written business plan."

I know few journalists who have ever written a business plan.

All the Boy Scout badges contain an icon that depicts what the badge represents. Canoeing is represented by oars. Animal science has a cow. Camping is a tent. Programming, a tough thing to show visually, is represented by ones and zeros.

Entrepreneurship, however, is a hand reaching up toward a cartoon star. I suppose it could be a ninja throwing a star, or someone catching a falling star. But we know what it means: "Reach for the stars."

Why a star? The other business-related badges are pretty concrete in their representations. The salesmanship badge has a simple sign that reads "sales." The American Business badge shows a graph, with stocks going up.

But entrepreneurship has a kid reaching to catch a star, something that's never actually been done. Even reaching for low Earth-orbit through private enterprise alone is a business that's younger than some Scouts.

This pops up a lot. The city of Montgomery was once covered with sky-blue posters that read: "Your Dream Starts Here." Countless TV ads have compared new business creators to visionaries like Einstein or Ghandi.

But this kid reaching for the star — what's his business plan? Has he done market research to determine who will buy his captured stars? Who will fund him in his plan to do the impossible? Maybe that's why the upturned hand seems so helpless, so plaintive.

It doesn't look like the entrepreneurs I've interviewed. Sure, they're risk-takers, but most of them brag about having a plan and meeting a need. Only if the plan doesn't work — which does happen more often than not — do they end up empty-handed. But they're usually crafting a new plan by that time.

So here's a need that someone ought to meet. A concrete, realistic symbol to represent entrepreneurship. If you can think of one, tweet it to me at @TLockette_Star.

As for meeting that need and making money off of it, well, maybe you can come up with a plan for that.

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