



Businesswomen return from Fla BootCamp with Plenty of Ideas

By Max Showalter

With success stories from Walk the Line and Nell Hill's still fresh in their minds, six Greater Lafayette business women are back on the job and planning to teach others what they learned.

The half-dozen owners of retail stores and eateries in downtown Lafayette and the Levee and Village areas of West Lafayette attended a two-day "Destination Business BootCamp" last week in Orlando, Fla.

"They were a lively bunch. It was a nice cross-section of businesses," said Jon Schallert, a national retail expert who conducted the seminar. "Some were relatively new, some were very experienced. It was a great idea to mix those groups together."

Among examples Schallert presented of businesses in disadvantaged locations that have achieved impressive, long-term success is Nell Hill's, an Atchison, Kan., store that racks up annual sales in excess of \$4 million and draws customers from Omaha, Neb., Des Moines, Iowa, and St. Louis.

Walk the Line is an 800-square foot women's shoe store in Carbondale, Ill., that attracts customers from many surrounding states.

"He opens your eyes to opportunities. It was incredible," said Tracy Deno, who opened New Dimensions Inc., a nature-oriented gift shop in downtown Lafayette late last year and was among the group that traveled to Florida for the training.

"It's just a question of getting them implemented. He gave us some very specific examples. It can be done, especially here in downtown Lafayette."

A grant of \$8,365 from the Lafayette Urban Enterprise Association allowed the Downtown Business Center to pay tuition for the seminar participants, who paid their own travel, lodging and other expenses.

Schallert will conduct a two-day, follow-up training visit in Lafayette in May.

"I have to get every owner ... to feel dissatisfaction with their business," he said. "I haven't succeeded if they aren't questioning their methods, tactics & strategies."

All six local participants plan to meet every Thursday morning to follow-up on the lessons.

Karyl Traeger has owned The Green Door, a gifts and interiors shop, for five years, and came home from the meetings with new ideas and a desire to put them into action.

"It was a great learning experience. I felt like we picked up some great advice on marketing strategies and things to do with our stores, inside and outside," Traeger said. "I was excited to see the other people from here excited. Our heads were just spinning."

Traeger will soon expand her business by purchasing the adjacent building at 838 Main St., which formerly housed Buck Creek Books.

Other downtown Lafayette business owners participating in the sessions held by The Schallert Group Inc. were Debbie Goode from Perfect Solutions and Charlene McAndrews from the Main Street Ice Cream Shop and Coffee House.

Traeger is encouraged that West Lafayette business owners Carrie Ehresman, from the Triple XXX Family Restaurant, and Linda Elmore from LE Originals also were involved.

"It was kind of nice to know that we were bridging that gap," she said. "We can all work together and make (the shopping area) one big long walk for people to also get their exercise."

FYI

- Information will soon be available from the Downtown Business Center about follow-up sessions The Schallert Group Inc. will hold in Lafayette in May.
- The DBC has offices in the Big Four Depot at Riehle Plaza, 200 N. Second St. The phone number is (765) 742-2313.

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