

THE FORT



An exclusive magazine celebrating local entrepreneurs and a way to

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT.



JOE O'NEILL: STEERING SUCCESS FROM TRUCKS TO TRIUMPH

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CRAFTING COMMUNITY AND CURED MEATS: THE GOOD BUTCHER'S STORY

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WE LOVE A GREAT ENTREPRENEURIAL STORY. AND WE HAVE A PODCAST TO PROVE IT.



EPISODE FEATURE
PRH GROUP

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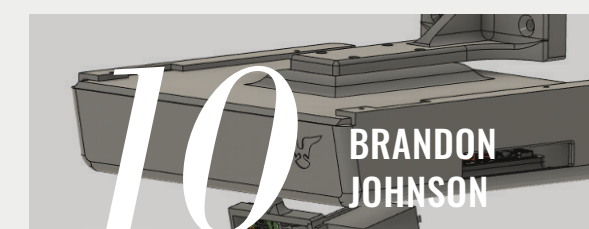
Brightening Horizons: How Friendship Fuels PRH Group

In this edition of Big Vision, we'll be chatting with Tish Randle and Laquanda Hoskins from PRH Group. While a business partnership founded on friendship might seem like a recipe for stormy weather, this duo proves it's all blue skies at their electrical construction company. Let's discover how they're rebuilding our communities, one storm restoration project at a time.

Cover Story



TRAILBLAZERS: STORIES OF VISIONARIES REWRITING THE RULES



Welcome to the Fort: Where Local Entrepreneurs are Shown Support

In this edition, we feature a host of local entrepreneurs who are using determination and innovation to make a difference in their communities. "The Fort" is a place where entrepreneurs are celebrated for their unwavering dedication to building their visions. You will also see curated national business features with rich stories. Business is our mission, and the time is always now to support local business and the people behind them making them run.



WANT EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS RESOURCES, CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT?

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BEING A BUSINESS OWNER SHOULD COME WITH A BADGE OF HONOR. IT DOESN'T.

But it could come with this super awesome business club!



FEB 20, 2025

Haven on the Farm in Edwards, IL



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CLUB EVENTS



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CUSTOM CLUB PORTAL

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KNOW SOMEONE WITH A BRILLIANT BUSINESS IDEA? THEY COULD WIN \$20,000!

Bank Tank is the \$20,000 pitch contest you don't want to miss! The event is sponsored by Fortress Bank, whose mission is to empower fellow visionaries and small business owners to fulfill their dreams. Finalists will be selected, and a panel of successful business owner judges determine the winner. It's open to the public, with music and drinks to keep things fun and festive! The finalist with the boldest vision wins \$20,000! What's your vision?

FORTRESS' OWN ELYCE BILLANY'S SHARK TANK JOURNEY IGNITES BANK TANK

The Fortress Bank Tank contest is our unique spin on the Shark Tank concept. Hosting this prestigious event will be Elyce Billany, Fortress Marketing Director, and her husband, Nathan. Notably, Nathan and Elyce achieved recognition on ABC's Shark Tank, where they successfully secured a deal with Kendra Scott.



FROM HIGHWAYS TO HIGH GROWTH

The Joe O'Neill Odyssey

Joe O'Neill's journey from a young truck driver to the transformative business owner of G&D Integrated is not just a tale of significant business growth but also a profound narrative of personal development, community impact, and enduring legacy. His philosophy, grounded in what he terms the "three C's—competence, character, and consistency," has been a cornerstone of his success and the success of G&D Integrated. As Joe explains, these principles are essential for any decision-maker, from supervisors to executives. Joe credits this belief in the three C's for his substantial growth and resilience in business.

Born into a family deeply rooted in the trucking industry in Peoria, Illinois, Joe was surrounded by the hum of diesel engines and the rhythm of the road from an early age. G&D Integrated began with just a few trucks, and Joe's father instilled more than a livelihood into the family—it became their identity. By 14, Joe was driving trucks and managing night shifts after school by 16—a testament to his early determination and work ethic.

Despite his deep involvement in the family business, Joe sought broader horizons. He pursued degrees in accounting and finance, followed by law, specializing as a bankruptcy attorney. This diverse academic background equipped him with a unique blend of skills crucial for future business leadership roles. In 1988, a pivotal call from his father brought Joe back to G&D Integrated, then a modest operation with about 50 employees based in Central Illinois. His father was a man who had initially put Joe in a truck with no training and simply said, "Damn it, just drive it." He was placed with some folks at Cat Transportation and told, "Just go figure it out." So that's what Joe did. Seeing this return as his chance to prove his mettle to his family and himself, Joe, armed with a mix of legal understanding and relentless determination, spearheaded an aggressive expansion that would redefine the company's future.

By 1996, Joe had transformed the once small-scale operation into a powerhouse with 3,000 employees. His strategic approach involved securing significant transportation and logistics contracts, notably capitalizing on strategic relationships built with industry giants like Caterpillar. This period of explosive growth was a testament to Joe's vision and the robust culture of hard work he fostered throughout the company.

Discover Joe O'Neill's journey from teenage truck driver to Owner and CEO, highlighting lessons in resilience, innovation, and leadership for entrepreneurs.



FROM HIGHWAYS TO HIGH GROWTH

However, the 2009 recession tested Joe's leadership as the company faced severe setbacks. Recognizing the need for change, Joe decided to step down, allowing new leadership to steer the company through turbulent waters. His humility and ability to recognize his limitations facilitated a necessary transformation within G&D Integrated, proving his mettle as a leader who could put the company's needs above his own.

Joe returned with renewed wisdom, focusing on cultivating a high-performance culture grounded in customer service excellence. Under his guidance, G&D Integrated thrived by fostering an environment where dedication and collegiality led to business success and personal growth among employees.

Beyond his business achievements, Joe O'Neill is a passionate advocate for entrepreneurs. Known for his readiness to offer guidance, he is crucial in mentoring the next generation of business leaders, underscoring the importance of resilience and ethical practices. His open-door policy and profound industry knowledge have earned him respect among aspiring entrepreneurs. As a prominent

speaker and thought leader, Joe frequently imparts his wisdom at industry conferences, championing ethical business practices and entrepreneurship. His speeches, rich with anecdotes, deliver practical and motivational insights that resonate widely.

Joe also adds 'confidence' as a key component to his guiding principles. "If you're going to be timid or passive, just don't get in the fight," he counsels. His deep curiosity about people's motives and beliefs shapes his leadership, which he roots in the cardinal virtues of fortitude, temperance, justice, and prudence. "Fortitude is about courage, temperance is about self-control, and prudence involves wise decision-making," Joe reflects, underscoring his approach to both business and personal interactions.

Joe O'Neill's entrepreneurial journey illustrates the profound impact of blending deep industry knowledge with a genuine commitment to personal and professional growth. His story encourages entrepreneurs to persist through challenges, innovate continuously, and maintain an unwavering commitment to integrity and community. It's a narrative that resonates deeply in the entrepreneurial world, where the road to success is often as important as the destination. Successful entrepreneurs frequently follow paths like Joe O'Neill's: embracing the journey's highs and lows, nurturing their dreams, seeking mentors, and paying it forward. 🙌

"If you're going to be timid or passive, just don't get in the fight."

JOE O'NEILL



NATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR

DAVID ROGIER AND AARON RASMUSSEN



Turning Rejection into Revolution: How MasterClass Made Learning Limitless

Founded by David Rogier and Aaron Rasmussen in 2015, the inspiration for MasterClass came from Rogier's grandmother, who, despite facing rejection due to her gender, Polish background, and religion, became a successful doctor. Her story instilled in Rogier the belief that education is the one thing no one can take away. This idea shaped MasterClass's mission: to make world-class learning accessible to everyone, allowing people to learn from the best minds affordably

and on their terms. MasterClass, an online learning platform, offers video lessons and demonstrations from experts in various fields. The classes taught by celebrities, industry leaders, and cultural icons cover subjects ranging from cooking and leadership to photography and writing. 🙌



DISCOVER LOCAL LEGENDS

A Q&A with Visionary
Entrepreneurs You
Should Know

*The best way to predict
the future is to create it.*

—PETER DRUCKER

BRANDON JOHNSON

Co-founder of
SHOT HAWK,

A response system that aims to contain an
active shooter before first responders arrive.

Q: How did you come up with your business/vision?

A: The ShotHawk responding unit was conceived during our junior year of college following the Uvalde school shooting. Drawing on my experience with an EF-4 tornado, we recognized active shootings as man-made disasters needing immediate response before law enforcement arrived. As engineering students, we developed and refined our initial concept into a commercially viable product.

Q: What are the average costs of your products/ services, and what do you sell them for?

A: The projected production cost for the SPOT is \$1,475 per unit, with a selling price of \$8,000, not including operating fees.

Q: What is your business's biggest challenge and biggest opportunity in the next 5 years?

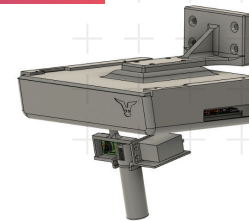
A: The biggest challenge will be securing our first large order of SPOT units and ensuring we have the proper resources in place to fulfill that order successfully.



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If you can help with Brandon's vision, email him at brandon.shothawk@gmail.com or show your support by visiting his website at shothawkai.com.

LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR



The biggest opportunity is releasing a product that could become as common as the Ring doorbell or as standard as a fire sprinkler and provide a similar role in reducing the impact of a threat.

Q: How will you take your business to the next level?

A: We are looking for early adopters interested in owning a pilot unit at a steeply discounted rate. Environments that this responding unit could be effective in are protecting education institutions, office buildings, government buildings, or critical physical infrastructure. We could also use more connections with companies that offer panic alarm or threat detection solutions and are interested in becoming an integration partner.

Q: What do you want people to know about you as a business owner?

A: I want people to know that I have worked hard to build the best team I could to develop what we seek to accomplish. I also would want people to know that we are committed to winning the right way and are not looking to take shortcuts.

Q: How could someone help you to move forward in your journey?

A: Introductions to potential integration partners, such as panic alarm companies or companies with threat detection systems, would be extremely helpful. Additionally, angel investment inquiries are accepted.

Q: If you could ask a group of successful businesspeople for help or assistance with one thing, what would it be?

A: Given our long development timeline with having a software and hardware solution, are there any ways we can work to generate some sales before having a fully developed product?



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

MIKE ACERRA

Co-founder & President of LUX BLOX

A creative building toy that encourages kids to explore and learn through nature-inspired designs.



Q: How did you come up with your business/vision?

A: Inspired by our love for architecture and our boys' play, Heather and I explored the evolution of educational toys. This led us to create Lux Blox based on scientific principles like fractal geometry. We aim to blend deep educational insights into play.

Q: What are the price points for your products?

A: Prices for Lux Blox kits start at \$19.99 and reach up to \$64.99 for advanced models like Jurassilux. We also offer premium STEAM Accelerator Kits for educational use.

Q: What is your business's biggest challenge and biggest opportunity in the next 5 years?

A: Our challenges include managing growth and innovating with advanced models. The growing interest in STEM provides significant opportunities to expand into new markets and enhance problem-solving through play.

Q: How will you take your business to the next level?

A: To advance Lux Blox, we'll highlight our strengths, enhance our marketing, strengthen educational partnerships, and continue innovating our product line.

Q: What do you want people to know about you as a business owner?

A: Heather and I are dedicated to creating valuable, innovative products. We've risked our savings and embraced challenges to build Lux Blox, now expanding internationally.

Q: How could someone help you to move forward in your journey?

A: Lux Blox needs more visibility. Exposure through media and partnerships can significantly enhance our reach and impact, helping us connect with more families and educators.

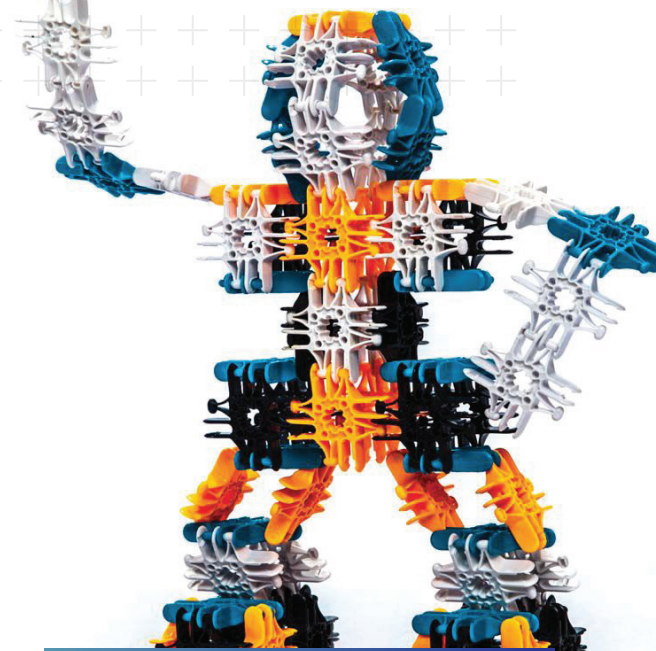
Q: If you could ask a group of successful business people for help, what would it be?

A: I'd like assistance amplifying our message about Lux Blox's impact on learning and creativity, expanding our network, and introducing our innovative products to new audiences.



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help with Mike's vision, email him at mike@luxblox.com or show your support by visiting his website at luxblox.com.



NATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR

Headbands, Heart, and a Mission: The Sustainable Rise of Maya's Ideas

Maya's Ideas is a sustainable fashion brand that creates clothing and accessories from recycled, organic, and vintage materials. The company was founded in 2008 by Maya Penn, who was just eight years old. At seven, a year earlier, while most kids were playing with cars and dolls, Maya unknowingly planned her future. Inspired by her time on Etsy, she decided to open her shop selling headbands and accessories. Driven by curiosity, she launched the shop, built the website herself, and committed to donating a percentage of profits to charity while ensuring all products were eco-friendly. By age 10, Maya had been featured in Forbes magazine, had become a three-time TED speaker, and was recognized by former President Barack Obama for outstanding achievement in environmental excellence.



MAYA PENN

THREAD LIGHTLY: FASHION THAT SAVES WATER

It significantly reduces water usage. The fashion industry is one of the largest consumers and polluters of water globally. However, sustainable fashion brands use materials and processes that minimize water use. For example, producing a cotton shirt traditionally requires about 2,700 liters of water, but sustainable practices can cut this down dramatically, helping to preserve this precious resource!



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

DIRK NAUMAN

Founder of
VISUAL 3D ACADEMY

Creators of an HVACR tool that uses 3D models to enhance technical learning.



Q: How did you come up with your business/vision?

A: The idea for the vision came from a doctor's visit. The doctor used a touchscreen with a 3D model of the human body as an educational tool. The doctor was able to virtually dissect the body on the screen to show the body parts in detail.

Q: What are the price points for your products?

A: Our products and services will be priced between \$100 and \$250 annually, targeting a midpoint to balance affordability with premium quality.

Q: What is your business's biggest challenge and biggest opportunity in the next 5 years?

A: Finding people with niche skills in 3D will be the biggest challenge in the next five years. However, the biggest opportunity will be teaching individuals these skill sets, allowing us to develop a skilled workforce capable of meeting the growing demand in this specialized area.

Q: How will you take your business to the next level?

A: We are introducing a new HVACR educational tool and preparing for the launch phase, focusing on marketing, branding, infrastructure, and adaptability as we anticipate growth and its challenges.

Q: What do you want people to know about you as a business owner?

A: As a former HVAC technician turned trainer, I launched Visual 3D Academy, my second startup, inspired by Shark Tank and insights from Dan Sullivan's books. My businesses focus on enhancing HVACR education through multimodal learning tools.

Q: How could someone help you move forward in your journey?

A: As a company developing skilled trades learning tools, including 3D modeling and augmented reality, we see opportunities for grants to support these innovations and will need a grant writer to advance our initiatives.

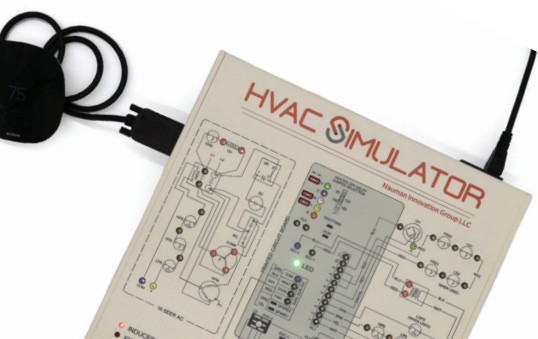
Q: If you could ask a group of successful business people for help or assistance with one thing, what would it be?

A: Who wants to be my business coach?



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help with Dirk's vision, email him at dirk@hvacsimulator.com or show your support by visiting his website at hvacsimulator.com.



NATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR



BRIAN CHESKY, NATHAN BLECHARCZYK AND JOE GEBBIA

From Air Mattresses to a Billion-Dollar Empire: The Airbnb Story

In 2007, roommates Brian Chesky and Nathan Blecharczyk rented out air mattresses in their San Francisco apartment for \$80 a night during a design conference, calling it Air Bed and Breakfast. They later teamed up with former roommate Joe Gebbia to turn it into a business. After facing rejection from investors, they raised \$30,000 by selling presidential-themed cereals. In 2009, they rebranded as Airbnb and secured \$600,000 in funding. By 2011, Airbnb was operating in 89 countries with over 1 million stays booked, and it became a "unicorn" with a valuation of over \$1 billion. Today, Airbnb has transformed travel, offering over 7 million listings in 220 countries and generating \$9.6 billion in revenue in 2023. 🏡

FROM CEREAL TO STELLAR: HOW SELLING PRESIDENTIAL BREAKFASTS FUELED AIRBNB'S RISE

Before Airbnb became a global phenomenon, the founders initially tried to fund their startup by selling limited-edition cereals like "Obama O's" and "Cap'n McCain's" during the 2008 presidential election. This quirky idea not only helped them raise \$30,000 but also gained media attention, surprisingly boosting their fledgling company!

HOLLY MOSACK

Owner of MOXIE FITNESS APPAREL

Leakproof activewear for the 1 in 3 women who experience bladder leaks while exercising.



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

Q: What is your business's biggest challenge and biggest opportunity in the next 5 years?

A: The biggest challenge is making smart financial decisions about my marketing strategy to grow my business. There is a huge opportunity to market my brand in the healthcare industry vs. the activewear industry, which could be a game changer.

Q: How will you take your business to the next level?

A: Contacts! Being an Army Veteran, I have my federal and state (Illinois) contract certifications. I need to meet with the key decision-makers to introduce my product and explain its benefits to the women they serve.

Q: What do you want people to know about you as a business owner?

A: I've always been "scrappy!" Growing up as an athlete, I got an Army ROTC scholarship to attend Northwestern University, and I served as an officer in elite units, such as the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and the 82nd Airborne Division. I learned the mantra of "never quit," and that's what keeps me committed to pushing forward.

Q: How did you come up with your business/vision?

A: My husband and I have owned a CrossFit gym for ten years, and I saw (and experienced) the frustration and embarrassment women had while trying to achieve a weightlifting goal, only to have it ruined by a bladder leak.



Q: What are the average costs of your products/services, and what do you sell them for?

A: My activewear line ranges from \$65-\$85. Small batch manufacturing in the US has led to a higher cost of \$26, making me even more excited to scale and watch that cost decrease.



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help with Holly's vision, email her at holly@gowithmoxie.com or show your support by visiting her website at gowithmoxie.com.

Q: How could someone help you to move forward in your journey?

A: I would love to be introduced to key decision makers, whether in the VA, the National Guard, or at any other government procurement level.

Q: If you could ask a group of successful businesspeople for help or assistance with one thing, what would it be?

A: Besides sharing their contacts, I would love to learn what marketing strategies have proven the most successful for them, especially in online retail.



NATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR

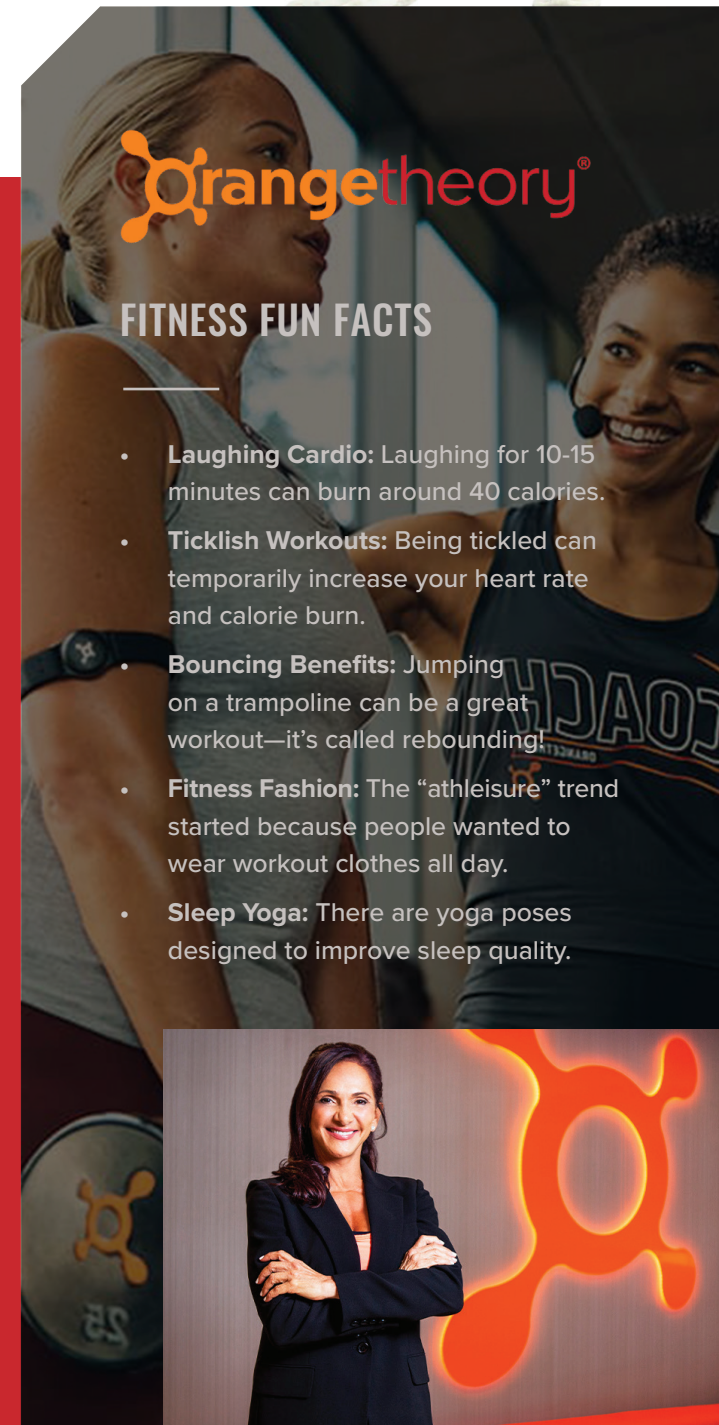
ELLEN LATHAM

Breaking a Sweat Across Ages: Orangetheory's Formula for Fitness Success

At 54, exercise physiologist Ellen Latham shifted careers to pursue her dream of creating a science-based fitness franchise, founding Orangetheory Fitness in 2010. Before perfecting her signature workout, Ellen worked at the prestigious Bonaventure Spa when it was the main fitness retreat for the stars. Her signature workout was designed to boost heart rates and keep the body burning calories long after the workout, Orangetheory quickly grew from one Florida studio to over 1,200 locations in 22 countries, with over 800,000 members and \$1 billion in sales. With 10,000 baby boomers turning 65 daily, Latham believes Orangetheory is well-positioned to appeal to all ages, offering a workout that adapts as people age, something few fitness chains have successfully tapped into.

FITNESS FUN FACTS

- **Laughing Cardio:** Laughing for 10-15 minutes can burn around 40 calories.
- **Ticklish Workouts:** Being tickled can temporarily increase your heart rate and calorie burn.
- **Bouncing Benefits:** Jumping on a trampoline can be a great workout—it's called rebounding!
- **Fitness Fashion:** The "athleisure" trend started because people wanted to wear workout clothes all day.
- **Sleep Yoga:** There are yoga poses designed to improve sleep quality.



DIANA, JOHN & BREN INGLES

Founders of WILD ROUTED

Sustainable products made of eco-friendly materials.



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

Q: How did you come up with your business/vision?

A: In late 2019, a road trip through National Parks inspired us to launch SG Merch, later rebranded as Wild Routed after participating in Peoria's gBETA cohort and drawing from a childhood of outdoor adventures and trips to National Parks with my grandparents.

Q: What are the average costs of your products/services, and what do you sell them for?

A: Our product costs vary. We produce in Peoria, IL, with items like MIRUM-based products hand-sewn locally and algae ink tees printed in Goodfield, IL. The average costs are \$28 for tees and \$4 for stickers.

Q: What is your business's biggest challenge and biggest opportunity in the next 5 years?

A: The biggest challenge is growing trust with the National Park buyers. The most enormous opportunity... we are an eco-focused brand, and that sets us apart from others. We are currently in four parks and plan to be in twenty by the end of 25.



Q: How could someone help you to move forward in your journey?

A: We're seeking grants for equipment like silkscreen machines, sticker printers, and laser cutters to expand our illustration library. Word of mouth to State Parks helps us gain trusted connections.

Q: What would you like people to know about you as a business owner?

A: We're a self-funded, woman-owned brand pursuing a Blue Ocean strategy with plastic-free products, in line with National Parks' 2028 single-use plastic ban. I also host the Rootlebox podcast, discussing eco-materials and innovations like SWAY's seaweed-based materials with industry leaders.



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help with Dana, John, and Bren's vision, email them at info@wildrouted.com or show your support by visiting their website at wildrouted.com.

Q: How can someone support your vision?

A: We create custom coloring books with algae ink for parks like Craters of the Moon and seek connections with eco-conscious parks, equipment, and suppliers to expand our sustainable product line. While not seeking equity investors, we welcome strategic advice from experienced business people.



NATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR

YVON CHOUINARD



Scaling Mountains and Sustainability: How Patagonia Redefined Outdoor Gear

Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia, started his journey as a craftsman and outdoor enthusiast, making steel pitons for climbers at 14. In 1957, he and Tom Frost launched Chouinard Equipment to improve climbing gear, but after realizing the environmental harm of steel pitons, Chouinard introduced aluminum chocks in 1972. The company expanded into outdoor apparel, inspired by a Scottish rugby shirt Chouinard used during climbs, and opened its first store in Ventura, CA, in 1973. After a split with Frost in 1975, Chouinard renamed the company Patagonia, inspired by a trip to South America. Patagonia expanded its product lines and became known for its commitment to environmental sustainability, pledging 1% of sales to conservation and earning B Corporation certification in 2012.

CLIMBING FUN FACTS

- **Everest Milestone:** Hillary and Norgay reached Everest's summit in 1953.
- **Speed Climbing:** El Capitan's speed record is under 2 hours.
- **Indoor Boom:** Over 1,000 climbing gyms exist worldwide.
- **Space Climbing:** Astronauts use a climbing wall on the International Space Station.
- **Women's Achievement:** Adam Ondra climbed the first 9b (5.15b) route in 2019.



CALVIN SCHNUCKER

LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR



Owner at THE GOOD BUTCHER

Meat produced in Iowa and serving Des Moines.

Q: How did you come up with your business/vision?

A: I've worked in the meat industry since 2008, always aiming to open a locally sourced butcher shop. Throughout my career, I've sought out people with skills to help me grow. During the pandemic, my wife and I moved to Des Moines to raise our kids near family, and I built connections with local farmers and suppliers, setting the stage for my business launch.

Q: What are the average costs of your products/services, and what do you sell them for?

A: Whole beef animals currently cost about \$3/lb "on the rail." Pricing is a balance between high-margin cuts like Ribeye and lower-margin ground beef, which makes up most of the weight. By processing ground beef into products like beef sticks and salami, we increase margins and shelf life. Our ground beef, with overhead, costs over \$5/lb, but we can sell beef sticks for \$15/lb.

Q: What is your business's biggest challenge and biggest opportunity in the next 5 years?

A: Our current challenge is getting our name in front of local-minded customers. Shopping at The Good Butcher supports not just us but also local farmers and processors. Our biggest opportunity in the next five years is growing our salami line, especially with new Direct-to-Consumer channels. If we can get our products in front of more people, I'm confident The Good Butcher can become a major competitor in the cured meat space.

Q: How must you take your business to the next level?

A: We need time to build a local customer base, learn which products resonate, and use that feedback to guide

our growth. We can scale successfully from there once we establish solid processes in our retail shop.

Q: What do you want people to know about you as a business owner?

A: I named "The Good Butcher" as both a mission and challenge, committing to goodness in all we do, from customer service to business decisions. Our ground beef donation program lets customers make purchases or donate to DMARC, helping us source more local animals and support the community. I aim to create more positive cycles where shopping with us benefits many.

Q: How could someone help you to move forward in your journey?

A: I'm open to mentorship from those who've started businesses, especially in growing Direct-to-Consumer markets or working with regional grocery chains to expand our salami and cured meat products.



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help with Calvin's vision, email him at calvin@thegoodbutcherdsm.com or show your support by visiting his website at thegoodbutcherdsm.com.



NATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR



JULES BEL

Bel, initially a small, family-owned cheese company known for producing authentic gruyere and comté, transformed its future through innovation. Established in France's Jura region in the mid-19th century, the company was revolutionized by Léon Bel, son of the founder, who introduced melted cheese for long-distance transport. In the 1920s, he launched La Vache Qui Rit (The Laughing Cow), cleverly packaged in small, convenient portions that resonated with consumers. In the 1930s, Bel introduced Babybel, inspired by the Dutch Edam cheese, which gained national popularity by 1964 as French tastes shifted toward milder cheeses and self-service shopping became more common. Bel seemed destined to remain a small enterprise, until the day when it decided to leave tradition behind and carve out a new market niche for itself through innovation.



MEET THE CHEEKY COW BEHIND THE CHEESE!

A humorous character from the popular French cartoon of the early 20th century inspired the Laughing Cow cheese. With its cheeky grin and distinctive red triangular packaging, the mascot was designed to be playful and memorable, helping the cheese stand out in a crowded market. The Laughing Cow quickly became one of France's most recognizable and beloved cheese brands!



KARI DAVIS

FORTRESS SIDE HUSTLER



Owner of KARI'S HOME BAKERY

In home bakery focused on making custom orders.



Q: How did you develop your business idea and get started?

A: I've been passionate about baking since grade school and dreamed of opening my bakery. I began by baking for birthdays during school, and this evolved into taking orders for various events like parties and anniversaries from family, friends, and, eventually, referrals. I manage a growing customer base through Facebook, texts, phone calls, and word-of-mouth.

Q: What is it like having a side-hustle while working at Fortress Bank?

A: Balancing my job at Fortress Bank with my baking orders can be stressful, but I thrive under pressure. The support from my coworkers and supervisors has been invaluable, encouraging me to embrace new challenges and continuously improve.

Q: How has owning a business helped you when working with Fortress customers?

Running my own business has given me insight into the needs of Fortress Bank's customers, especially in understanding the nuances of electronic payments like Venmo, Cash App, and PayPal, which enhances my ability to assist our customers effectively.



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help with Kari's vision, email her at daviskari1998@gmail.com or show your support by visiting her Facebook page [@Kari'sHomeBakery](https://www.facebook.com/Kari'sHomeBakery).



Dan Graham, 1982 for the Titans



Compass CEO Dan Graham

Fortress CEO Lee Garlach



FORTRESS BANK + COMPASS MORTGAGE:

CHARTING A VISIONARY COURSE.

Big news at Fortress Bank! We're excited to announce that Compass Mortgage is now part of our team, providing us with a clearer path to better serve you. Since Compass Founder - Dan Graham's days in the NFL, he has had a knack for being a part of a winning team. Dan, Lee, and Dean have known each other for over a decade and are excited to put their own winning teams together. By joining forces, we ensure that every step of your journey towards homeownership is smooth and guided by the best in the business. Compass Mortgage is dedicated to a better mortgage experience, thanks to its authentic core values and strong work ethic. Whether you're buying your first home or refinancing, we now offer more resources and expertise than ever.

At Fortress Bank, your vision is our mission, and now, with Compass Mortgage by our side, we're more ready than ever to make your dreams a reality.



Watch "The One Where Fortress and Compass Come Together".





FORTRESS BANK

What's Your Vision?



BankFortress.com

