

THE FORT

2026 EDITION

*An exclusive magazine celebrating
local entrepreneurs and* **VISIONARIES.**

**BIG IDEAS NEED MORE THAN A STAGE: HOW
BANK TANK INSPIRED THE FORTRESS
BUSINESS CLUB**

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**CRAFTING PRECISION, ONE RIDE AT A TIME:
WRIGHT CYCLES' STORY**

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



EPISODE FEATURE

GREEN LEAF PRODUCTIONS

UNCOVER THE STORY BEHIND THE
SUCCESS—AND MORE JUST LIKE IT...

In this edition of Big Vision, we sat down with Rudy Vegliante, Owner, CEO, and Executive Producer of Green Leaf Productions. From producing award-winning videos to helping brands tell unforgettable stories, Rudy has built a career around bringing creative ideas to life. He shares how his passion for storytelling, strong team culture, and willingness to embrace new challenges have shaped Green Leaf Productions into a trusted creative partner. Get ready to see the world through a different lens as Rudy shares what it takes to turn vision into reality.



To listen to this episode and others,
scan the code or visit
WhatsYourVisionPodcast.com.

THE FORT



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Welcome to the fourth edition of *The Fort*, proudly presented by Fortress Bank.

In this premier issue, we present a magazine that's more than just a publication; it's a powerful network of accomplished business leaders coming together to support and uplift the next generation of entrepreneurs in our communities. A "Fort" represents a strategic stronghold, and through *The Fort*, we aim to provide rising entrepreneurs with the strategic advantage of exposure to the best in the business—our readers. Join us in building a strong foundation for the future of entrepreneurship.

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BANK TANK



BUSINESSES NEED MORE THAN A BANK

A Fortress Business Club Story

For years, we sat across the table from business owners and heard the same thing. Not about loans. Not about rates. Not even about banking. We heard about hiring challenges. Leadership struggles. Growth decisions. Succession planning. Cash flow. Burnout. Opportunities they weren't sure how to pursue. Problems they felt like they had to solve alone. The more conversations we had, the more we realized something important: Businesses need more than a bank. They need education. They need connections. They need other business owners. And yet, when we began looking for organizations that provided those things specifically for established business owners throughout our markets, we kept running into the same challenge. There was a gap. So we made a decision. Instead of looking for someone else to solve the problem, we'd build it ourselves.



It Started With Listening.

The Fortress Business Club wasn't built in a conference room. It was built through conversations. We met with business owners from different industries, different communities, and different stages of growth. We asked questions. We listened. We learned. What surprised us wasn't how different their businesses were. It was how similar their answers were. While every company faced unique challenges, nearly every owner consistently identified two things as essential to long-term success: Education and Connections. The most successful owners weren't trying to figure everything out themselves. They were constantly learning. And they were surrounding themselves with people who could help them think differently. That feedback became the foundation of everything that followed.

One lesson became clear very quickly. A business with eight employees is asking very different questions than a business with eighty employees. An owner trying to improve cash flow is facing different realities than an owner thinking about succession planning, acquisitions, or selling a business. That's why we didn't want to create a one-size-fits-all program. Instead, we began organizing businesses based on stages of growth. Today, our roundtables are built around those stages because the most valuable conversations happen when business owners are sitting with peers who understand the challenges they're facing right now. The questions change as businesses grow. The need for trusted relationships never does.

NOT EVERY BUSINESS FACES THE SAME CHALLENGES



The Launch of the Fortress
Business Club

TESTING LEARNING

IMPROVING

Like any business, we knew we wouldn't get everything right the first time. So we treated the Business Club the same way we would any new venture. We launched. We listened. We adjusted. Over time, we continued gathering feedback from participating business owners to determine what provided the most value and what didn't. Recent feedback showed strong engagement with the roundtable format and interest in continuing those discussions on a recurring basis. Some ideas gained traction. Some evolved. Some were replaced with better ones. And that's exactly how we wanted it. The Business Club was never intended to be a static program. It's designed to be living, evolving community that continues adapting to the needs of the business owners it serves.

Building Around Value.

As we listened to owners, a few themes continually rose to the top. Owners wanted opportunities to learn from one another. They wanted better visibility into economic trends affecting their businesses. They wanted meaningful connections—not another room full of business cards. Those insights helped shape what the Business Club has become today. Curated roundtables bring together business owners facing similar growth-stage challenges. Quarterly economic updates provide perspective on trends affecting businesses and the broader economy. The club portal creates another avenue for resources, ongoing connections, and continued learning between events. Each component serves the same purpose: Helping business owners learn, connect, and grow.

A CLUB FOR OUR CLIENTS

Today, after building, testing, listening, and learning, we're excited to open the Fortress Business Club to all Fortress business clients. The club is being expanded following a successful pilot and positive feedback from participating owners. But in many ways, this isn't the finish line. It's another starting point. Because the Business Club isn't a product. It's a community. And just like the businesses we serve, we expect it to continue evolving. We'll continue listening. We'll continue adapting. We'll continue looking for new ways to bring education, insight, and meaningful connections to the people building businesses across our communities. Because at Fortress, we've learned something simple: Businesses need more than a bank. They need people in their corner. And that's exactly what we're trying to build.



INSPIRED BY OUR CEO

From the archives: CEO, Lee Garlach, pictured with his family shortly after purchasing a beer distributorship.

BEN COHEN & JERRY GREENFIELD

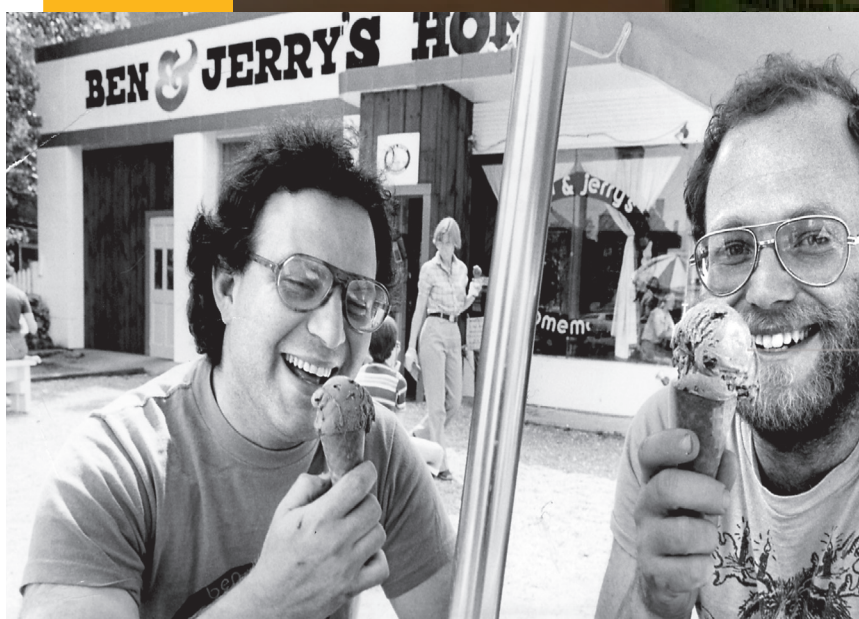


Two friends, one gas station, and a very large ice cream dream.

What started as a small ice cream shop in a renovated gas station quickly grew into one of the world's most recognizable brands. Ben and Jerry's success wasn't built on a traditional business plan—it was fueled by creativity, persistence, and a willingness to learn along the way. By embracing bold ideas, taking risks, and staying true to their values, the two friends proved that you don't need years of experience to build something extraordinary. Their journey is a reminder that some of the biggest success stories begin with a simple idea, a little determination, and the courage to take the first step..

TOP 5 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT BEN & JERRY'S:

- 1 Ben & Jerry's first ice cream shop was built inside a renovated gas station in Burlington, Vermont.
- 2 The founders took a \$5 correspondence course in ice cream making before opening their business.
- 3 Ben Cohen's reduced sense of taste led the duo to create ice cream packed with large chunks and swirls, making texture a signature part of the brand.
- 4 The company has introduced hundreds of flavors over the years, with many becoming fan favorites before being retired.
- 5 Retired flavors are honored in the famous Flavor Graveyard, complete with humorous "headstones" and epitaphs.



Founders Ben Cohen & Jerry Greenfield

THE CHANGEMAKERS IGNITING

INNOVATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES



Meet some visionary, local entrepreneurs
you might not know, but should.



*Innovation is not about
creating the new; it is
about executing new ideas
to unlock new value.*

— JAMIE NOTTER

BRAD & LISA GODDARD

**Co-Owners At REVOLUTE MACHINE,
Coal Valley, IL**

Precision Manufacturing Company specializing in
aerospace-grade CNC Machining



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

Q: What is the elevator pitch for your business?

A: Revolute Machine is a precision manufacturing company based in Western Illinois that specializes in aerospace-grade CNC machining. We use advanced robotic automation to run highly efficient, 24/7 machining operations that produce complex precision components for the growing space and aerospace industries. Our goal is to prove that a small rural manufacturer can compete globally by combining automation, engineering talent, and disciplined execution.

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

A: The biggest challenge will be scaling capacity fast enough to meet demand while maintaining the quality standards and operational discipline our customers expect. Aerospace manufacturing requires consistency, reliability, and precision, and growth has to be managed carefully. The biggest opportunity is the continued reshoring of advanced manufacturing and the rapid growth of the space and aerospace industries. Companies increasingly want dependable domestic suppliers who can provide high-quality parts with shorter lead times and lower supply chain risk. We believe our automation-first model positions us extremely well to meet that need.



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

*If you can help Brad & Lisa's vision, email them at
Brad@revolutemachine.com or visit their website
<https://revolutemachine.com>*

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

A: The next phase of growth will require continued investment in automation, equipment, and infrastructure so we can expand production capacity while staying lean and efficient. We also need to continue building relationships within aerospace and advanced manufacturing industries to secure larger long-term production programs.

Beyond equipment, we are focused on building a scalable operational foundation that allows us to grow without losing the culture, quality, and responsiveness that helped us get here.

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

A: I care deeply about building something long-term and meaningful — not just financially successful, but something that creates opportunity in our region and proves that advanced manufacturing can thrive in rural America.

I approach the business with a very hands-on mindset and a strong focus on continuous improvement. I'm naturally drawn to solving difficult operational problems, improving systems, and finding ways to compete at a higher level than people expect from a small company. At the same time, I understand that businesses are built on relationships and trust. We take pride in doing what we say we're going to do, being honest with customers and partners, and continuously reinvesting back into the business for the long term.

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

A: Strategic introductions would be incredibly valuable — particularly connections within aerospace, defense, satellite, and advanced manufacturing companies that are looking for reliable domestic manufacturing partners.

We would also benefit from relationships with experienced manufacturing and business leaders who have scaled capital-intensive operations and can provide guidance around growth strategy, automation expansion, and long-term planning.

KIANA & BIANCA NORVILLE

**Co-Owners At Sisters in Bloom QC,
Davenport, IA**

Faith-based floral and gifting company
dedicated to helping people celebrate life's
most meaningful moments

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

A: Sisters in Bloom QC was born out of both passion and purpose. We have always loved creating beautiful experiences for people, but the deeper vision came from wanting to build something that could uplift others emotionally, spiritually, and personally. Flowers have a unique way of bringing comfort, joy, and connection during both celebrations and difficult seasons.

What started as a creative passion quickly turned into a mission-driven business rooted in faith, community, and service. We always loved making people smile, creating beautiful spaces, and bringing positive energy into every room we enter. We wanted to create a company that not only provided beautiful products, but also reflected love, excellence, and encouragement in every interaction.

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

A: The biggest challenge is scaling while maintaining the

quality, creativity, and personal connection our customers have come to expect. As demand grows, building the right team and systems will be essential.

Our biggest opportunity is expanding through corporate partnerships, weddings and events, subscription floral services, and regional growth. The recent acquisition of Bloom Luxe Balloons & Events has strengthened our event offerings, while our faith-centered, community-driven approach continues to set us apart.

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

A: To take the business to the next level, we need strategic partnerships and growth capital to expand our team, operations, marketing, and event capabilities. Our focus is on building efficient systems, increasing brand visibility,



**Sisters
IN BLOOM**

FAITHFULLY ROOTED,
BEAUTIFULLY BLOOMING

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help Kiana & Bianca's vision, email them
at hello@sistersinbloomqc.com or visit their website
<https://www.sistersinbloomqc.com>



and creating long-term corporate partnerships that drive sustainable growth.

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

A: We would ask for guidance and connections related to scaling sustainably while preserving company culture and quality. Learning from leaders who have successfully built systems, teams, and strategic partnerships would be incredibly valuable as we continue growing.

We believe the right mentorship and relationships can accelerate both impact and long-term success.



NATIONAL STORY

She hated her pantyhose... so she reinvented an industry.

Sara Blakely cut the feet off her pantyhose before a party because she hated how they looked under white pants. She sold fax machines by day, worked on Spanx at night, and had zero fashion or business background—but a ton of persistence and humor.

Did you know?

Sara Blakely credits much of her resilience to an unusual dinner conversation growing up. Each evening, her father would ask, “What did you fail at today?” Instead of celebrating only success, her family celebrated effort and risk-taking. That mindset gave her the confidence to hear “no” over and over until she finally heard “yes.”

SARA BLAKELY

BY THE NUMBERS:

- \$5,000**
 - The amount Sara invested to launch SPANX.
- 0**
 - Business experience before starting her company.
- 100%**
 - Ownership she maintained for years without outside investors.
- 1 PAIR**
 - The prototype she cut the feet off before a party—an idea that changed the shapewear industry.
- MILLIONS**
 - Women who now own a pair of SPANX.

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DEAN WRIGHT

Owner of WRIGHT CYCLES,
Moline, IL

A full-service bike shop best known
for its top-notch, professional
bicycle service



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

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

A: Our vision is to give everyone the gear, the bikes, and the accessories they need to have a great ride. As we grow to include bespoke, handcrafted frames and forks, we aim to redefine what a local bike shop can be. Our vision is to provide the Quad Cities with a welcoming bike shop offering exceptional service, quality gear, and options for every rider. As we expand from a community bike shop into a premier builder of handcrafted frames and forks, we aim to build on our rock-solid professional reputation and deliver bikes that are as unique as the riders who own them.

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

A: The Quad Cities is a great place to ride. There is a great intersection of trails that can take riders throughout the riverfronts; however, there needs to be more accessibility for riders within the cities. As people come to cycling for transportation, exercise, and recreation, Wright Cycles will be there as more cities come to the realization that providing bike infrastructure is good for the economy and enhances the livability of our communities. We see bike transit becoming more popular, safer, and more accessible as infrastructure improvements become more common.

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

A: As bicycles become increasingly advanced, maintaining a highly trained team is essential to delivering the level of service our customers expect. To continue growing Wright Cycles and expand Wright Precision bicycles, we're focused



Wright
CYCLES

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help Dean's vision, email him at
wrightcyclesllc@gmail.com or visit their website
<https://www.wrightcyclesllc.com>



on attracting and retaining talented staff while increasing awareness of our brand beyond our local market.

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

A: Our goal is to become a regional or national brand and become a destination business for

specialized products and services. We need advice on how to scale intentionally. What is the best way to scale and capitalize on that kind of growth and communicate the brand to a national audience while keeping the novelty and intimacy of a family-owned business that made it special in the first place? Learning the best ways to increase visibility, manage demand, and support growth while protecting craftsmanship would be invaluable.

NATIONAL STORY



OLE KIRK
KRISTIANSEN

From wooden toys to world domination—one brick at a time.

Long before LEGO became one of the world’s most recognizable toy brands, Ole Kirk Kristiansen was a Danish carpenter struggling to keep his small woodworking business alive during the Great Depression. After demand for furniture declined, he turned his attention to crafting high-quality wooden toys, believing that children deserved products built to last. Despite devastating factory fires, financial setbacks, and the challenge of transitioning from wood to plastic after World War II, Kristiansen never wavered from his motto:



“ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH”

That commitment to craftsmanship led LEGO to introduce its first plastic interlocking bricks in 1949, laying the foundation for a company that would inspire generations of builders around the world. Today, LEGO remains family-owned, proving that resilience, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to quality can build far more than toys—they can build a legacy.



KENNEDY BROMLEY

Owner at KEN'S BARKBUS & SPA,
Bettendorf, IA

A luxury mobile dog grooming
company



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

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

A: I worked at a high volume dog salon where dogs weren't always treated as a priority. People and dogs were always walking in and out, phones ringing, dogs barking in kennels.. it just wasn't for me! I wanted to create the absolute best experience for the dog in front of me, and making it convenient for the owners as well! My appointments are one-



on-one so the dog gets all of my attention and there are no distractions. This makes the whole grooming process more enjoyable for everyone!

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

A: My biggest challenge is I want to be able to grow and

eventually have a fleet of vans in this area and expand into other branches of the animal industry, but finding hard working employees who prioritize the dogs is always the hardest part. These are peoples family members and I don't want this to just feel like a job to people. Finding people who care is challenging! My biggest opportunity is that there are very few mobile dog groomers in my area, right now I am the only one taking clients within an hour of here. I can pick and choose dogs on my waitlist and make it a little easier on myself. I can always pick up extra dogs if needed as well.

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

A: I'm someone who worked in the animal industry for 12 years in many different branches: grooming salons, vet clinics, multiple pet stores, and never felt like they were "enough". Sure, they made "enough" money to survive but they weren't "enough" for the animals. I started this business on a dream of "I want to do this right at whatever cost" and I marketed it towards the pet owners who truly want the absolute best for their animals. I don't take shortcuts. Once I invest myself into something I'm going to do whatever it takes to make it the absolute best thing it can be and that is the dream that Ken's BarkBus & Spa was built on.

Ken's BarkBus
& Spa



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help Kennedy's vision, email her at kensbarkbus@gmail.com or visit her Facebook Page

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

A: Right now, my focus is on strengthening the business before making additional investments. As I begin to expand, I'll need support with social media and advertising to increase brand awareness. Once people see what I do, they usually become customers—it's simply getting my name out there that can be the biggest challenge.



**DIETRICH
MATESCHITZ**



**CHALEO
YOVIDHYA**

Jet lag, a random drink, and one very bold idea.

Long before Red Bull became synonymous with extreme sports, it was inspired by a modest Thai energy drink called Krating Daeng. While on a business trip in Thailand, Austrian marketing executive Dietrich Mateschitz discovered the drink after struggling with jet lag. Recognizing its global potential, he partnered with creator Chaleo Yoovidhya to adapt the formula for Western consumers, introduced the now-iconic slim silver-and-blue can, and built a brand that sold a lifestyle rather than just a beverage. Instead of relying on traditional advertising, Red Bull invested in athletes, daring stunts, and unforgettable events—transforming a niche drink into one of the world's most recognizable brands.



NATIONAL STORY

GIVE YOUR DRINK WINGS WITH THESE EASY RED BULL-INSPIRED REFRESHERS.:

- **Berry Boost:** Pour one can of Original Red Bull over ice, add a splash of cranberry juice, a few sliced strawberries, and garnish with a lime wedge for a refreshing, berry-forward drink.
- **Tropical Charge:** Combine one can of Original Red Bull with 2 ounces of pineapple juice and a splash of orange juice over ice. Finish with a pineapple wedge for a tropical twist.
- **Peach Sunrise:** Fill a glass with ice, pour in one can of Peach Edition Red Bull, add 3 ounces of orange juice, and top with a splash of grenadine for a vibrant, sunset-inspired refresher.
- **Citrus Spark:** Combine one can of Sugarfree Red Bull with 3 ounces of lemonade over ice, then garnish with fresh lemon and lime slices for a bright, citrusy pick-me-up.

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BRIAN OLSEN

Owner of SMASH PIZZA,
Bettendorf, IA

A small pizza shop featuring all house made pizza dough
and breads

LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR



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

A: I have been in the restaurant business since I was 16 years old. I knew I wanted to be a chef from an early age and started my journey the day I was legally able to cook in a commercial kitchen. I attended Le Cordon Bleu at the age of 17 and have pursued the dream of opening my own restaurant ever since. In my earlier career I worked as a chef in fine dining establishments but eventually realized I wanted to make food that was more accessible to my friends and family. That is when I built my first wood fired pizza oven and discovered my love for pizza and bread. After teaching myself how to make Neapolitan pizza I got certified in 16 styles of pizza from the International School of Pizza with Tony Gemignani. I then set out on a mission to one day own my own pizzeria that focuses on a menu made entirely from scratch & high quality ingredients

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

A: Our biggest challenge year over year has been our ever growing volume of business. I have operated/opened around 10 restaurants and have never seen an operation

climb 10-15% a year like this. Our dining room can only host 46 guests, we are only open 5 days a week, and we can barely keep up. We don't currently intend to grow or open another space. Instead we want to focus on maintaining and growing what we have rather than spreading ourselves thin with a second location

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

A: I guess our next move would be to open location number two, but I would rather focus my efforts on maintaining high food and service quality at the current shop. We have, however, started looking into having a co-packer produce a frozen pizza line for us. This would be a wonderful way for us to utilize our brand name and create some passive income once it's set up.

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

A: I have been in this business for almost 30 years now and am



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help Brian's vision, email him at
brian@smashqc.com or visit his website
<https://www.smashqc.com/>

still in the trenches with my staff. As a chef/operator I do everything, I open the store, put away deliveries, wash dishes, cook food, handle my own accounting, create featured dishes, place food orders and manage the entire team as the owner. I love what I do and I have sacrificed everything to reach my current position. Therefore, building a good culture and work environment for my staff has been very important to me. My employees are family to me and are the true backbone of my operations!

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

A: Honestly, things are going incredibly well. We've outgrown our space, but I'm not ready to expand. The challenge is balancing growth while maintaining a great experience for my staff and customers. I'd love advice from successful restaurateurs on managing high demand in a small space.



NATIONAL STORY

NICK WOODMAN

He just wanted better vacation photos.

Nick Woodman was a surfer who couldn't get decent action shots in the water. So he made a camera for himself, strapped it to his wrist, and built a brand that turned everyday people into extreme storytellers. What began as a personal frustration quickly evolved into GoPro, a company that redefined how adventures are captured and shared. Woodman started the business with money earned from selling shell belts and handmade accessories while traveling. By focusing on rugged, wearable cameras and letting customers showcase their own footage, GoPro grew from a niche surf gadget into a global technology brand used by athletes, travelers, and creators around the world.



FUN FACTS ABOUT GOPRO:

- **First Prototype:** The original GoPro was a 35mm film camera attached to a wrist strap, created so surfers could capture their own action shots.
- **Built from Necessity:** Nick Woodman created GoPro after realizing there wasn't an affordable way for everyday athletes to capture professional-quality footage.
- **Humble Beginnings:** Before GoPro became a global brand, Woodman helped fund the company by selling handmade belts and jewelry while traveling.
- **Customer-Powered:** GoPro's biggest marketing tool became its customers, who shared incredible adventure footage captured with their cameras.
- **Out of This World:** GoPro cameras have gone beyond Earth, capturing footage aboard the International Space Station.

LUCAS GRYMONPREZ

Owner at TRACKSIDE SOLUTIONS LLC,
East Moline, IL

An East Moline engineering company delivering innovative manufacturing solutions.

LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

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

A: The business started out of a need from a local farmer who partnered with an agricultural manufacturer for testing and validation. After a few years of operating the business, the team realized the opportunities were endless. The biggest advantage I've seen in our business and the continued growth is listening to our customers pain points and needs. If you genuinely listen and have trusted partnerships your customers will tell you if your vision aligns with their needs.

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

A: One of the biggest challenges facing our industry and company is navigating generational and cultural shifts while generating excitement for careers in the trades. Our workforce spans multiple generations and demographics, each with unique motivations, expectations, and definitions of workplace value.

The biggest opportunity in the next 5 years is acquisition of other small businesses. There's beginning to be so many small business owners out there who don't have a succession plan, employees, or family that have interest in owning the business, but they want to maintain their employees and see the business can operate. We would have a unique opportunity here to fold a lot of our existing customers into these services and continue to grow as an organization.

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

A: We must continue strengthening our structure and processes while attracting and retaining top talent. While we are fortunate to have tremendous opportunities for growth ahead of us, our ability to capitalize on them will ultimately depend on the people we have in place to execute them.

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

A: Over time, those who work with Tracksides recognize that we're in this for the long haul. Our focus on relationships over transactions comes from my own experience of working with the same two business owners since I was 15. That appreciation for loyalty continues to shape how we serve our employees, customers, and partners.

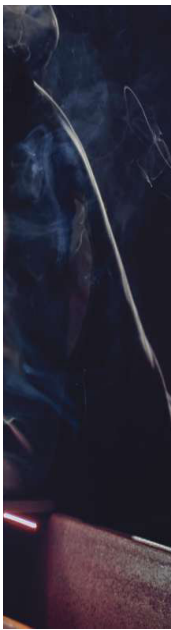
Q: How could someone help you to move forward in your journey?

A: Right now, we could utilize introductions and funding opportunities. The most beneficial introductions would be any connections with businesses, universities, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, or assisted living homes. We also really appreciate funding opportunities such as grants, competitions, etc., as we are not yet taking equity investors.

TRACKSIDE
SOLUTIONS

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

If you can help Lucas' vision, email him at lgrymonprez@tracksidesolutions.com or visit his website <https://www.tracksidesolutions.com>



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

A: Understanding how they reward and retain employees, especially top performers and what they would do differently or would have done differently when scaling the businesses. What did you find to be the most useful allocation of your time in the business?



NATIONAL STORY



BEN CHESTNUT & DAN KURZIUS

It started as a side project for small businesses—and stayed loyal to them.

Mailchimp began in 2001 as a small side project inside a web design agency in Atlanta. Founders Ben Chestnut and Dan Kurzius created the platform to help their small business clients send better email campaigns—never expecting it would become one of the world’s most recognizable marketing platforms. Instead of chasing investors or rapid growth, the founders focused on their customers, building a product that solved real problems for small businesses. They grew the company using their own revenue, stayed independent for nearly two decades, and leaned into a playful brand personality that made email marketing feel more approachable.

LESSONS FROM THE MAILCHIMP PLAYBOOK:

Solve a real problem. Mailchimp started because small businesses needed a better way to reach customers.

Listen before you grow. The founders built the company around what customers actually needed.

You don’t have to follow the traditional path. Mailchimp grew without outside investors, proving there is more than one way to build a successful business.



FORTRESS BANK SIDE-HUSTLERS



**Jake Thomas of THE FROZEN SPOON,
LaHarpe, IL**

Family owned ice cream shop
with soft serve ice cream,



Q: How did you come up with your business idea and get started?

A: Josie (Jake's wife) worked at The Dairy Barn in Bowen, IL, during high school. The family-run ice cream shop was famous for cones so large they had to be handed out the back door because they wouldn't fit through the serving window. Seeing the smiles on customers' faces inspired her dream of owning an ice cream shop someday. That dream became reality after moving to LaHarpe, where she found the perfect location next to the city pool and baseball fields. After many hours of moving, remodeling, and preparing the building, we opened with the help of supportive family and friends.



AT FORTRESS BANK

We support side-hustlers. This family-run favorite proves the sweetest businesses are built together.

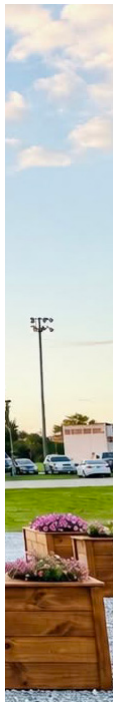
Q: What is it like having a side-hustle while working at Fortress Bank?

A: Thankfully, Josie does most of the heavy lifting on the business side. She manages product inventory, employee scheduling, marketing, and countless other tasks. I mainly stop by occasionally to greet customers and taste the product to make sure it's top quality. In fact, my branded T-shirt from The Frozen Spoon says on the back, "I'm just here for the free ice cream." It is exciting to see the community members of LaHarpe and surrounding towns bring their families to try our ice cream. We are extremely grateful for all the support we have received so far and are happy to provide a place for people to enjoy a sweet treat.

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

A: It has given me a new perspective on the enormous amount of behind-the-scenes work it takes to run a business. It's not as simple as just turning the lights on and off. As a small business owner, you have to be heavily involved in the day-to-day operations and have a reliable support system of people you trust to help when needed. Owning this business has also given me another opportunity to connect with Fortress customers and non-customers outside the bank.





S. TRUETT CATHY

NATIONAL STORY

One simple sandwich. One big idea. A recipe for remarkable

His entrepreneurial journey actually began long before Chick-fil-A. In 1946, at just 25 years old, he and his brother opened a small Atlanta diner called The Dwarf Grill (now known as The Dwarf House). While running the restaurant, Truett developed a boneless chicken breast sandwich that could be cooked as quickly as a hamburger. That recipe eventually became the original Chick-fil-A Chicken Sandwich and led him to open the first Chick-fil-A restaurant in 1967 inside Atlanta's Greenbriar Mall.

What began as one simple idea eventually transformed into one of the most recognizable restaurant brands in the country. Truett Cathy's commitment to quality, consistency, and serving people well proved that lasting success isn't built overnight—it's built one customer at a time. His belief that a business should be built around people, not just products, became a guiding principle that continues to influence the company today. From a small diner in Georgia to a nationwide brand, Chick-fil-A's journey shows how a simple idea can grow into something much bigger with the right vision and values.

Chick-fil-A

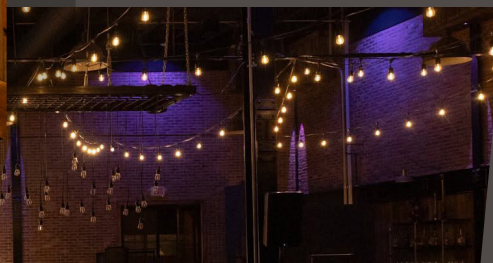
FUN FACTS:

- Chick-fil-A's original chicken sandwich was created in 1964 and has remained a signature menu item for more than 60 years.
- The name "Chick-fil-A" was created as a play on "chicken fillet," with the "A" representing top quality.
- The first Chick-fil-A restaurant opened in 1967 inside Greenbriar Mall in Atlanta, Georgia.
- The famous "Eat Mor Chikin" cow campaign launched in 1995 and became one of the most recognizable fast-food advertising campaigns in the country.
- Chick-fil-A is known for its customer service, and employees are encouraged to respond with "My pleasure" as part of the company's hospitality culture.



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