

SBA Success Story

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Small Business Offers a bit of Heaven to Mississippi Gulf Coast Residents

GAUTIER, MS -- Delorise Nettles, owner of Delo's Heavenly Coffee Shop, is a "self proclaimed coffee nut". "I love coffee and delight in sharing it with others," she said.

The idea of her starting a coffee shop was one that her entire family supported because of her interest in coffee. In August of 2004, with determination, Delorise set out to find the information she needed to open her business in Gautier, MS. She attended several workshops at the local Mississippi Small Business Development Center. "I worked closely with the SBDC counselor on my business plan and it began to take shape".



The SBDC is a partnership between the U.S. Small Business Administration and the university and community college systems in Mississippi for the purpose of providing management, technical and business assistance to small business owners and would-be entrepreneurs.

After working on the plan, securing the building and completing the renovation, Delo's opened in 2005, almost one year after she began her business plan. Delo's Heavenly of Coffee Shop offers a full line of hot and iced coffee drinks, teas, pastry goods, daily lunch special, and internet service.

Her plan was well thought out. First, find the perfect location. "I spent several mornings counting the cars and trucks as they passed the location I had in mind for the business" she said. Second, find the ideal opening time. "I open at 4:30 a.m. to gain from the high traffic volume due to a shift change at a nearby shipbuilding corporation". Third, find ways to limit overhead cost. "I overcame the labor challenges by hiring my sister to manage the shop during normal business hours," she said. Nettles opens and closes the shop each day while continuing to work a full time job. "It's been a challenge working early morning and late evening hours, but I know the business isn't ready to support me fully" she said. "You want to grow the business which means profits must go back into the business; but balancing both tasks is difficult and requires physical stamina".

In 2005, while most businesses on the Mississippi Gulf Coast were ravaged due to Hurricane Katrina, Nettles was able to reopen Delo's quickly since her building did not suffer significant damage.

In 2006, Nettles expanded, opening a second coffee shop on a military base located in Columbus, Georgia. "The concept remains basically the same with coffee, tea, pastries, other food items, but I added more computers and video games that the service personnel can pay by the hour to use", she said. Business has exceeded what she expected at this location; the reason is the revenue from the video games. Employees have since grown from 4 to 7.



Reminiscing, Nettles recalls the obstacles she had to overcome. "One obstacle in opening a coffee shop is overcoming the image of "another" coffee shop opening," she laughed. Nationwide, the coffee industry has been growing steadily, especially among national chains; so how do you convince

a lender that your non-franchise shop will be a success? First one must disprove the perception that coffee is coffee is coffee. "The true coffee nut disagrees with that" she said. She's instead counting on coffee nuts to find her blend the difference. "I blend two different beans for my daily brew selection using a combination of Columbian and French Roast," she said. The result is a delight for the coffee lover and those who don't have such a sophisticated palate like the coffee as well. She also researched recipes for her frozen coffee drinks and added her special touch to make the drinks tasty and unique. "My daughter, who was in college at the time of the opening, spent time finding recipes for me to try as well as suggesting names for the drinks".

Teresa Speir, former Gulf Coast SBDC Director and said Nettles did a lot of research on the coffee industry before starting to work on her business plan and packaging her loan. "Her determination was a definite strength", said Speir. Nettles, always wanting to give back to her community, located the shop near a community college with the intent of it becoming a positive atmosphere for college students to experience, and it having someone there for them to listen to if things were rough. "Many people helped me as I pursued my educational goals and I wanted to pay back by helping others," she said. "Assisting students with financial information can be the difference between completing college and dropping out".

Nettles actively participates in Chamber functions and her church. She is a graduate of East Central High School in Hurley, MS, the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College in Gautier, MS and Mississippi State University in Starksville, MS.

To contact the SBDC near you, call 1-800-725-7232 or visit the Mississippi SBDC office at www.olemiss.edu/depts/mssbdc/.

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