

Finalists Announced for Small Business of the Year

According to the judges for the Mobile Area Chamber's 2016 Small Business of the Year award, the finalists this year were an impressive bunch. Among their comments:

- "They have a handle on the needs to expand their customer base with creative campaigns and marketing."
- "Their focus on developing a new line of business across diverse, yet related, markets

speaks strongly of future growth."

- "The firm has taken a number of creative, innovative and necessary steps to ensure future expansion."
- "It appears they value employees as well as customers."
- "Longevity of client relationships speaks volumes."

Finalists for Small Business of the Year are: B&B Pet Stop, FusionPoint Media and Karen

C. Simmons PC. Together, these companies employ 59 people and have operated in Mobile 57 years.

On Wednesday, June 8, during the Chamber's Small Business Awards luncheon, the winner will be revealed as well as the Outstanding Entrepreneur of the Year, E. Grace Pilot, co-founder of Pilot Catastrophe Services.

During the Small Business conference, the Chamber will offer three valuable professional development opportunities to increase business growth. Topics include matching small businesses and potential lenders, addressing critical legal issues and engaging employees in the innovation process. *(See more on pg 14.)*



B&B Pet Stop

Years in business: 35
Number of employees: 44
Address: 5035 Cottage Hill Rd.
www.bbpetstop.com

As a child, B&B Pet Stop founder **Bill Trufant** was so fascinated with tropical fish that when he was old enough to work, he was paid in fish for the first few years. Spring Hill College lured the Louisiana native to Mobile, and after graduating he opened his first store in 1981 in Saraland. Within a year, he moved it to Mobile to be closer to his customers.

In its 10th year, Trufant expanded the business to a 14,400-square-foot superstore on Cottage Hill Road near University Boulevard, and recruited his sisters, **Sally Trufant** and **Mary Trufant**, to join the company.

A few years ago, the expansion of big box competitors in Mobile and online sales dealt a blow to the company. The Trufant trio buckled down and made 2014 the "year of renovation," followed by 2015, the "year of marketing."

B&B made improvements to its store, introduced new discounts, added inventory and revamped its customer loyalty program. In addition, B&B organized a year's worth of unique events to draw people to the store – like Extreme Ferret Races, Bunny Hop and pet photos, donating the proceeds to local rescue groups.

B&B Pet Stop has 44 employees and is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year.



FusionPoint Media

Years in business: 16
Number of employees: 5
Address: 4356 Midmost Dr.
www.fusionpointmedia.com

The team at FusionPoint Media knows “it’s never the cookie-cutter approach that wows the crowd.” To stay relevant the company must produce a fresh mix of videos, graphic design, web design and photography to capture attention-getting results for both local clients and Fortune 500 customers.

The founding members, led by President **Brian Jordan**, have roots back to QMS (now Konica Minolta) as members of the QMS marketing team and a former QMS client.

They strive to take customer service to unprecedented levels

by being accessible all hours of the day. That personal response to the growing cry of “I need it ASAP” is the heart of FusionPoint’s success and customer growth.

And in keeping with their “Yes, we can” attitude, after purchasing a 6,000-square-foot building last year, the 16-year-old company’s five employees took on some of the needed renovations themselves, strapping on their tool belts and getting out their paint brushes.

The new in-house studios will provide another revenue stream for the company. One is currently being rented to a client producing a nationally syndicated reality show broadcast on the Oxygen channel.

Karen C. Simmons PC

Years in business: 5
Number of employees: 10
Address: 712 Oak Circle Dr. E., Ste. A
www.ksimmonscca.com

When it comes to handling a client’s financials and/or taxes, the margin for error is zero. And that’s a truism that applies to the majority of Karen C. Simmons PC’s customers – small businesses.

Before starting her own company five years ago, **Karen Simmons** was a partner in a larger firm.

In the past year, she has implemented new technologies, offering clients 24/7 access to tax records, the ability to export file backups and live, one-on-one assistance.

Despite crediting increased technology with making her more efficient, technology also presents one of the company’s greatest challenges, Simmons said. Delays in releasing tax season software reduce an industry-wide four-month busy



season down to one. Employees participate in continuing education and adjust hours to stay ahead of the timeline as much as possible.

Last year, Simmons took advantage of the decreasing number of firms offering payroll services by purchasing

a Payroll Vault franchise. The move is saving her customers time, money and liability, and expanded her services to include payroll, timekeeping and human resource functions.

While retaining employees at a small company can be challenging, Simmons believes

her family-friendly policies make the difference.

“Employees who are encouraged to actively participate in the things they enjoy tend to have an even greater drive to be successful in their jobs,” she said.

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Left to right: John Erwin, Aaron White, Carla Joyner, Sam Davis Jr., Doug Thomas, Brandon Armstrong, Joel Ross, Karen Morris, Jim Sigler, John Naughton

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Small Business Conference 2016: Information You Need to Make Your Business Grow

The Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business Conference offers networking and professional development seminars designed to arm business owners and entrepreneurs with critical knowledge, tools and strategies. During this conference, participants will meet experts who will provide business advice and consulting, business development and growth strategies, and lenders to assist with financing needs. Sessions include:

June 6

"Where's the Money?"

Matching Businesses and Lenders for Business Growth

Program: Facilitated by the Alabama Small Business Development Center Network (SBDC)

One of the most pressing challenges to managing and expanding a small business is having or finding sufficient resources for capital.

"Where's the Money?" kicks off with presentations from financing experts providing capital from \$500 to more than \$2 million. You'll learn what financing options are available and whether you should use debt, equity or alternative sources of funding.

After lunch, attendees will have access to one-on-one meetings with the financing experts to discuss specific needs and questions.

When: 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Where: American Red Cross, 35. N. Sage Ave.

Cost: \$20 members or \$25 non-members, and includes lunch.

June 7

"The Power of Innovation"

Engaging Employees for Business Growth

Program: Presented by Dale Carnegie Training by Emerald Coast

Leaders tap into the power of human potential. They accept that they alone don't have all the answers, customer knowledge, and new ideas needed to move an organization forward. The innovation process provides nine important steps to achieving continuous innovation in your business resulting in new discoveries, better ways of doing things, reduced costs and improved performance and bottom-line.

When: 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Where: Mobile Area Chamber, 451 Government St.

Cost: \$20 members or \$25 non-members. The first 20 Chamber members to register will receive a \$5 discount.

"Critical Legal Issues Impacting Business Growth"

Program: Facilitated by David Hannan, shareholder, Maynard Cooper & Gale PC

Legal headaches and the danger of crippling litigation and liability can take you by surprise and severely hurt your business's bottom line. Leading attorneys and professionals will address timely topics of new rules relating to independent contractors, the joint employer rule, workplace violence, cyber liability, social media, non-compete agreements and how to protect your company from costly litigation.

When: 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Where: Mobile Area Chamber, 451 Government St.

Cost: \$20 members or \$25 nonmembers. The first 20 Chamber members to register will receive a \$5 discount.

June 8

Mobile Area Small Business Awards Luncheon

Program: The awards luncheon recognizes and celebrates entrepreneurship and small businesses. The Outstanding Entrepreneur and Small Business of the Year will be presented.

Professional speaker, author and entrepreneur Rob Hackbarth will share one of the most powerful stories of his life – a baseball game he pitched when only 10 years old. Throughout that game, three major principles that served as the cornerstone to the success of his company, were captured, along with the importance of the "centerfielder concept." A storyteller at heart, Hackbarth reveals simple tools for success based on the timeless principles of attitude, teamwork, passion and enthusiasm, to encourage and inspire others to believe in themselves for life-changing results.

When: 11:30 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Where: Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel, 64 S. Water St.

Cost: \$40 Chamber members or \$50 nonmembers/\$400 Chamber member tables of 10

Contact Information for the Small Business Conference and Awards Luncheon

Contact **Brenda Rembert** at 251-431-8607 or brembert@mobilechamber.com

Reservations are required by Wednesday, June 1, and payment is due at time of registration. No refunds after that date.

Visit events.mobilechamber.com for more details on all of the slated events.

Meet Rob Hackbarth, Small Business Awards Lunch Speaker



A Birmingham native, **Rob Hackbarth** established his dream company, Hackbarth Delivery Service (HDS), in 1975. Headquartered in Mobile, the company has grown from a one-vehicle startup to 26 locations in 10 Southeastern states.

Hackbarth will give the keynote address at the Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business Awards luncheon on Wednesday, June 8, at 11:30 a.m. at the Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel.

Over the past 40 years, Hackbarth and his wife, Carol, have been active with the

Chamber. The couple has also served on the boards of the Customized Logistics and Delivery Association, the professional association for the transportation industry; and L'Arche Mobile, working on behalf of the mentally challenged. They have also worked with other local nonprofit organizations.

As the second edition of his first book, *There are No Small Moments*, was being released two years ago, Hackbarth passed the baton as CEO of HDS to his daughter, **Kelly Picard**, so he could concentrate on speaking engagements, write a weekly

newsletter and work on his second book, *The BET*, set for release later this year.

In 2014, Hackbarth established a new company, Mondays are Great LLC, as the foundation for his writing and speaking ventures. Lecture topics include leadership, overcoming adversity, teamwork, time management and positive thinking. As the premise for his first book supports, Hackbarth believes that a single moment in time may be the most important in a person's life, encouraging others to live expecting something great.



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Outstanding Entrepreneur Grace Pilot

“Our company was built on faith.” That’s what **Grace Pilot** says about Pilot Catastrophe Services, the company she and her husband Walter started in their kitchen 33 years ago. A few months later, Hurricane Alicia struck Galveston and Houston and gave the fledging business, created to help people in times of tragedy, the security the couple needed. Today, it is one of the largest independent insurance adjusting firms in the country.

The Mobile Area Chamber is recognizing Grace Pilot as the Outstanding Entrepreneur Wednesday, June 8 at its Small Business Awards luncheon.

Grace credits the success of Pilot Catastrophe to principals she learned from her Christian

parents. “They taught us to work hard. Something not everyone learns today.” She adds, that her family didn’t have a lot growing up, but what they did have her father shared with others.

Pilot adjusters have worked every major disaster including Hurricane Katrina, earthquakes in California, fires in Malibu and tornadoes in the Midwest. At press time, the company has a team deployed in response to those affected by the spring floods in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

While the direct employee number is tied to the number of adjusters in the field and fluctuates, the company consistently employs hundreds locally and thousands nationwide,



including all of Grace and Walter’s children. In addition to its Mobile headquarters, Pilot has training centers in Dallas and Hudson, Ohio.

Grace serves as chair, secretary and treasurer of Pilot Catastrophe. Recently celebrating her 80th birthday, she still comes to the office several days a week and collaborates with fellow board members on corporate strategies and oversees operations and training.

Her selection as Outstanding Entrepreneur came from a committee of business leaders using guidelines such as a substantiated history as an established entrepreneur, the impact of the business on the local job market and innovation.

“Grace is a long-time leader and philanthropist. The committee talked at length about the value and contributions

made through Pilot Catastrophe that have impacted hundreds of thousands of disaster victims throughout the nation as well as many right here in our community,” said **Bill Sisson**, the Mobile Area Chamber’s president & CEO. “She exemplifies the spirit of

entrepreneurialism, and she and the company are models for excellence when it comes to giving back to our community.”

Among her many philanthropic endeavors, the E. Grace Pilot Foundation supports efforts to create a positive change in the communities in which she serves, providing financial

support primarily in the areas of education, economic community needs and Christian ministry.

“...the value and contributions made through Pilot Catastrophe have impacted thousands of disaster victims throughout the nation as well as many right here in our community.”

Bill Sisson
Mobile Area Chamber
president & CEO

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