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Three Small Businesses Stand Out - One Will Be Named the Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business of the Year

A Louisiana native comes to Spring Hill College and stays to open his own pet store. Co-workers and one QMS client launch their own marketing firm. A former partner in a larger accounting firm goes solo.

Every business has a story of how and why it was started. This year, the Mobile Area Chamber will help tell three of them leading up to the Chamber's Small Business of the Year award revealed Wednesday, June 8.

This year's finalists are B&B Pet Stop, FusionPoint Media and Karen C. Simmons PC. In addition, the Chamber will honor Grace Pilot of Pilot Catastrophe as the Outstanding Entrepreneur.

"We know the everyday challenges small businesses face and overcome," says **Darrell Randle**, the Chamber's vice president of small business development. "It's an honor to celebrate their accomplishments and contributions to our local economy."

The Chamber defines a small business as one with 100 or less employees. The Small Business of the Year applications were judged by a panel of individuals with diverse expertise including management, finance and business development. Finalists were chosen based on five primary criteria:

- **Staying Power** - proof of growth, expansion, reputation and good business practices;
- **Economic Impact** - evidence of job creation and revenue and profit;
- **Innovation** - illustrating creativity and ingenuity;
- **Community Contribution** - either financially or encouraging/allowing employees to participate; and
- **Strategy** - future growth plans with specific and measureable goals.

A few highlights about each finalist:

- more -



B&B Pet Stop

Spring Hill College lured Bill Trufant, a Louisiana native to Mobile. Trufant, who when he was first old enough to work was paid in fish, opened his first store in 1981. Within a year, he moved B&B Pet Stop to Mobile to be closer to his customers. He then recruited his sisters, Sally and Mary, to join the company.

Innovative marketing strategies, new inventory and physical improvements not only held big box competitors and online stores at bay, but kept the Mobile-based business growing. B&B Pet Stop has 44 employees and is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year.

FusionPoint Media

Brian Jordan and partners launched FusionPoint Media in 2000. They each shared a bond – either as an employee or a client – with QMS, the Mobile-based laser printer manufacturer later bought by Konica Minolta. The company specializes in video production, web design and all things needed from an in-house marketing department. Clients range from local small businesses to Fortune 500 corporations. The team’s customer service extends to all hours of the day and is key to the company’s success.

In 2015, Jordan expanded FusionPoint’s physical presence and purchased a 6,000-square-foot building. The company has five employees.



Karen C Simmons PC

Before starting her own company, Karen Simmons was a partner at a larger accounting firm. To keep her company growing, she implemented new technologies, including offering clients 24/7 access to tax records and live, one-on-one assistance.

The firm serves small businesses in all stages from start-up to retirement planning, and combats challenges with ongoing staff education, adjusting hours and making clients aware of identity theft and potential scams.

Last year, Simmons saw an opportunity to enhance her competitive position and purchased a Payroll Vault franchise. The five-year-old company has 10 employees

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