



Pictured: In front, Billy Thompson, (L-R) Frank Ashley, Rob Dearing, Clay Bates (bartender), Carson Kennedy and Jim Walker (owner), operates this long standing restaurant at the tip of Dauphin Street.

## No Brakes for OK Bicycle Shop

When the Walker brothers first considered opening a business in downtown Mobile in the mid-1980s, they found the area “basically abandoned,” said **Jim Walker**. Jim and **Woody Walker** had moved to Fairhope in 1983, and after walking the empty streets of Mobile and considering its potential, they decided it was where they wanted to be.

The brothers were visionary pioneers who have helped breathe new life into downtown Mobile. After their initial visit they established themselves as the owners of G.T. Henry’s, one of the first bars to open in the then-emerging Dauphin Street nightclub scene in 1988.

Today, they own four interrelated businesses that anchor the western end of the LoDa entertainment district. The Walkers have 47 employees under the OK Bicycle Shop umbrella.

Open until 3 a.m., 365 days a year, OK Bicycle Shop is the Chamber’s Small Business of the Month. The Bike Shop,

as it’s affectionately known, has doubled its number of employees and increased revenue in the past three years, and the Walkers are generous contributors to local causes.

The Walker brothers bought the Bike Shop building at Dauphin Street and Washington Avenue in 1995. Bicycles were sold at the site from 1922 throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the American Bicycle Shop. The store called OK Bicycle Shop was a couple of doors down and the two bike shops merged in the 1950s.

After OK closed in 1991 and its owners moved westward to Spring Hill, the building was used as a coffee shop with a live music venue next door until the Walker brothers bought it.

From the beginning, Jim and Woody wanted their bar to become a permanent fixture. “We told our architect we wanted the mechanical systems ‘bulletproof,’” said Jim. “We were always looking long-term, from the power to the

oversized bathrooms to the glassware. We wanted to step it up a notch.” Jim had a sign built to match the original vintage one from a photograph.

In 2009, the Walker brothers hired **Robbie Collier**, with whom they’d worked as a consultant since 2004, as general manager of their business. “We have the vision, and Robbie is great at keeping us between the sidelines,” Jim explained of their roles.

Under Collier’s guidance, the Walkers have added three additional restaurants. Three years ago, they added a spacious courtyard behind The Bike Shop, adding 140 seats to the 50-seat bar. In October, they proudly ventured into fine dining with the opening of Union in the former Painters’ Union building.

“It’s amazing how many people come to us who want to open a business, and we steer them in the right direction,” said Jim, who welcomes the competition. “All ships rise with the tide.”

Go to [mobilechamber.com/award.asp](http://mobilechamber.com/award.asp) to submit a Small Business of the Month nomination, or contact Danette Richards at 431-8652 or [d Richards@mobilechamber.com](mailto:d Richards@mobilechamber.com)