

Small Business of the month



Standing in front of Petrie's wall of ribbons and bows are the mother-daughter team who manage this Small Business of the Month. Pictured are Emily Cobb, who manages the business and Elise Parker, who first launched Petrie's in 1998.

From Purses to Picture Frames, Petrie's Has What Every Girl Wants

"I always said I would never own a gift shop," says **Elise Parker**, owner of Petrie's. Yet that's just what this Small Business of the Month winner did.

What changed her mind was actually working in a gift shop.

Before she ventured into a full-time business, Parker says she paid her dues setting up booths at regional craft shows, showcasing her handmade children's clothing and, later, jewelry. She first tried her hand at retail in 1998, when she sold jewelry and low-priced gifts in rented space during the holidays at Springdale Mall.

"But people wanted our goods year-round for Easter, birthdays, Christmas and just any special day," says Parker. So with a leap of faith, the popular boutique transitioned from part-time to full-time. Developments at Springdale forced the store to move across the street to Bel Air Mall, and its

new location helped capture additional walk-by traffic.

With 2,000 square feet, Parker and her daughter **Emily Cobb**, who manages the business, have the room they need to stock the novelty items almost any preteen or young girl wants, including personalized luggage, hair bows, jewelry, lamps, frames and numerous knickknacks.

"We're like the WalMart of gift shops," says Parker, who is proud of maintaining the \$3 price on earrings, one of the items that launched her success back in 1998.

While Parker still makes the hair bows and the staff still makes some of the jewelry, Cobb's specialty is personalization. Names can be printed on a range of different merchandise, from cups to piggy banks. And that, she says, is how "Petrie's is able to create a personal connection to with

our customers, by customizing their purchase."

At market, the pair look for novelty items that can be personalized and try to anticipate the next hot thing among their target market. Cobb admits sometimes they just luck into it. When the "right" girl bought a Petrie's backpack, it spurred the sales of a whopping 10,000 more, explained Cobb.

The store has a staff of 12, including Parker and Cobb. Parker says she has very little turnover, and the company works hard to show employees they are valued with good pay and flexible schedules. "I know they are a big part of us being successful. I never leave without thanking them," said Parker.

The store is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 5:30 p.m. For more information, call 478-1893.

Go to mobilechamber.com/award.asp to submit a Small Business of the Month nomination, or contact Danette Richards at 431-8652 or drichards@mobilechamber.com.