

# 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](http://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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.



## FusionPoint Media

**Years in business:** 16  
**Number of employees:** 5  
**Address:** 4356 Midmost Dr.  
[www.fusionpointmedia.com](http://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](http://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.