



Mobile Bay Firewood is expanding to provide air-cured oak to local customers and beyond. Pictured from left to right are Colleen Smith, Isaac Mcgaha, Nas Saybe, Seif Wahid, Todd Sigler and Jason Smith. Photo by LA Fotographe

BUSINESS IS SMOKING HOT FOR MOBILE BAY FIREWOOD

Fire is all about respect. Lose it, and you're liable to sacrifice more than you bargained for. Be reverent, and it can literally make your fortune.

Such has been the lesson for **Jason** and **Colleen Smith**, owners of Mobile Bay Firewood, the Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business of the Month. For more than a decade, the Smiths sold firewood on the side, making a little extra from the deadfall and other resources found on 30 acres of rural land they owned. But in 2018, the two made a full-time go of it, and expansion has happened at a rapid pace.

What started off as a slate of weekend customers buying pickup loads of the Smiths' air-cured oak became something

much more significant as the couple deconstructed a simple concept. Although firewood is an inexpensive commodity, it's very heavy and costly to ship, as many commercial companies in the Mobile area discovered on a regular basis.

"It must be cheaper for local companies to buy firewood locally, right?" Colleen said. The answer was a resounding yes. And although she and Jason soon learned that, when it came to USDA regulations, insect life was more of a focus than the timber being transported, the core equation still worked in their favor. What didn't was labor.

Jason, who is also a firefighter with the Mobile Fire-Rescue Department, didn't need to fell, cut, cure and deliver the company's product. There was definitely a better way.

With a few full-time employees and using two massive kilns capable of curing six cords of wood at a time – each cord is a stack measuring 4 feet wide, 4 feet high and 8 feet long – Mobile Bay Firewood now serves residential clients on both sides of the bay, as well as commercial customers like Greer’s grocery stores and Moe’s Original BBQ, which runs all restaurant smokers on the company’s oak.

“It’s such a great, mutually beneficial relationship,” Colleen said of those types of clients. “Because we’re local, we’re able to beat competitors while still maintaining a good price point for us. So it’s a win-win across the board.”

And the bugs? They’re no match for the heat of a kiln, ensuring that all their customers get clean, quick and efficient-to-burn firewood without the carbon footprint inherent in interstate shipping.

This summer, Mobile Bay Firewood opened a new, 68,000-square-foot complex in Prichard, and its owners are eyeing more growth moving forward, possibly to national companies like Lowe’s, Home Depot and Publix.

“We’re really excited about all of that,” Colleen said.

Photo by LA Fotographe



COMPANY NAME: Mobile Bay Firewood

OWNERS: Jason and Colleen Smith

WEBSITE: mobilebayfirewood.com

Want to be featured as a Mobile Area Chamber Small Business of the Month? Go to mobilechamber.com to submit an application online, or contact Danette Richards at drichards@mobilechamber.com or 251.431.8652 for questions and/or additional information.

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