



TOP TIER

Get to know this year's **movers** and **shakers**! Savvy entrepreneurs, accomplished business owners and standout men and women of Wilmington and beaches who are rising to the top.

By AMANDA STILES » Photos by KELLY STARBUCK PHOTOGRAPHY » Intro photo for illustration by CECE BOYKIN



My Business: Markraft Cabinets, LLC is a service and installation company that focuses on kitchen and bath cabinetry, countertops and cabinetry hardware. We have been servicing the Wilmington market since 1985.

Why I Chose This Career: I never thought I would be in this type of business when I was younger and going through college. I like that the business is challenging, in a good way. In a sense, it's like sports; it pushes you to be better each day. It is a team sport/business. You can't do it alone, and being able to rely on your teammates is imperative to succeed. Our team and the people we work with every day make us better. I like working with people and being in the customer service business. Our staff is amazing and, because of them, you want to come to work every day!

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: Giving a customer bad news. Our team's expectations are set high, and we never want to disappoint a customer. Additionally, some things are out of our control, so that is hard. But, we have to deliver the news, no matter what; moreover, immediately. You also need to be ready to provide a solution and timeframe to make it right. To this day, it remains a hard thing to do, and it's not the call or the conversation necessarily, but accepting that you may have let a customer down. We work hard to not let anyone down – this includes our co-workers, our leadership, our customers, and ourselves.

You'd Never Guess That: I was 1984 Breakdance Champion in Staunton, VA. Only my immediate family knows this; and I'm guessing, now at my age, I don't care if anyone else knows. I still think it's hilarious...and no, I will not show anyone any old moves!

Cee Edwards
Markraft Cabinets, LLC
910-793-0202
markraft.com



Betsy Rhodes Herring and Wayne Rhodes

Albert F. Rhodes Jewelers

910-313-6935

albertfrhodes.com

Our Business: We are a full service retail jewelry store offering fine jewelry at every price point, jewelry repair, watch repair and jewelry appraisal services.

Best Business Advice We Ever Received: From our father, Albert Rhodes: "Always be honest and offer fair value."

Why We Chose This Career: We began as a way to help our father and continue

the family business. Soon thereafter, we both developed a love for fine jewelry and retail work. It was fun!

One Thing We've Learned The Hard Way: Always go with your gut, and never judge a person by their appearance.

You'd Never Guess That: Wayne didn't wear shoes to his first job interview!

Why We Love Doing Business In Wilmington: We have both lived here all our lives and our customers are our friends. We also enjoy getting to know new people in the area and learn about why they chose Wilmington as a vacation destination or as their new home. We feel very fortunate to have celebrated our 70th year in business last year. We are grateful that Wilmington has so kindly supported us.



Eclipse Artisan Boutique and Blue Moon Gift Shops

Melissa Hindle-Sherman and Jill Stewart

910-799-9883, 910-799-5793

eclipseartisanboutique.com

bluemoongiftshops.com

Words of Wisdom of Other Men/Women: Never look behind you to see who is running the race; keep your eyes forward and focused on the finish line.

Why We Chose This Career: You know you are on the right path when you can make others happy. There is nothing more rewarding than helping someone, especially when it comes to something so important, such as art. Art is the heart and soul of any community.

One Thing We've Learned The Hard Way: The business will only grow as much as the work you put into it. We work extremely hard making Eclipse Artisan Boutique and Blue Moon Gift Shops one-of-a-kind shopping destinations, and we love every minute of it!

Why We Love Doing Business In Wilmington: The people. Wilmington is a community with deep roots and really good people. You live in this town, and you have to be happy. People visit us, and we want them to be happy. There is a huge local art community that thrives, and we're proud to be a part of it!



Atlantic Appliance

Mark Edwards, Kevin Edwards,
Hampton Tillery, Wade Tillery

910-791-2222

atlanticappliance.net

Best Business Advice We Ever Received: Reverse roles; always treat customers the same way that you would want and expect to be treated.

Why We Chose This Career: We're all following in our fathers' footsteps. Hampton, Mark and Kevin are 2nd generation owners, and Wade is the 3rd generation.

You'd Never Guess That: Atlantic Distributors started in 1948 as a wholesale hardware distributor, selling to independent hardware stores and lumberyards throughout Southeastern North Carolina and Northeastern South Carolina.

Why We Love Doing Business In Wilmington: Wilmington is our hometown, and we enjoy providing the best quality products and customer service to all of our friends and neighbors that are that are lucky enough to live in the beautiful region of Eastern North Carolina.



Artee Fabrics and Home

910-686-2950 • arteefabricsandhome.com

(L to R) Jasmine Sredanovich, Linda Reinger, Nancy Cobble

Our Business: Features the best in fabrics, trim and home accessories with affordable pricing, a wide selection and knowledgeable staff.

Best Advice to Other Men/Women: Be a team player, encourage others, and never stop learning.

Our Mission Is To: Our mission is to provide customers with ideas, fabrics, and accessories to customize their dreams into reality.

Why We Chose This Career: We chose this career to pursue our love of fabrics and design and to work alongside talented people with similar interests.

We've Learned The Hard Way: To measure twice and cut once!

The Secret to Good Business Is: Communication, customer service, and follow through.

Best Business Advice I Ever Received: The best business advice I have received was to never strive to be the smartest person in the room. Surround yourself with intelligent people that will challenge ideas, drive innovation and offer new perspectives.

Why I Chose This Career: I chose to enter into the retail/men's clothing industry based on the fact that fashion is a daily medium for self-expression and allows people to discover and explore their individuality – which is what I think we all sort of strive for, being the best version of ourselves. That's why we focus on offering products that are different, and not what you'll find anywhere else.

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: I always find it difficult to ask for help, and I wind up in over my head sometimes as a result. However, it's such a simple task, which always concludes with better results than a solo attempt. I still need to remind myself of this, often.

You'd Never Guess That: I am a Wilmington native! My family has been living in Wilmington for generations, and I am so thankful to now own a small business in my hometown.



Michael Vinson
Bloke Apparel & Supply
910-679-4137
blokeapparel.com



Chris Gray (seated)
and DeDe Bennett (standing)
niche. Décor & Gifts
910-769-8839
nichebycustomhome.com

Our Business: A Bramble exclusive store with exclusive upholstery, gifts and décor.

Words of Wisdom to Other Men/Women: Be REAL.

Why We Chose This Career: We wanted to create a shop with an experience for all who enter its doors; a place to find unique items to help one create a comfortable home full of their own style and vision. Also, we wanted a one-stop shop with gifts for all occasions.

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: Old fashioned paper and pencil still gets the job done when the computers go down.

Why We Love Doing Business In Wilmington: Because it's home, and the combination of locals and tourists make each day special and unique.

(top L-R) Andrea Villareal, PA-C, Sam Meeks, RN, Shelley Piatkowski, RN, Jaclyn Tooker, CPS, Rose Truesdale, Cosmetic Coordinator, Savana Lamar, PA-C (bottom L-R) Kelly Britt, PA-C, Rosalyn George, MD, Karin Hipp, PA-C



WDC

WILMINGTON
DERMATOLOGY
CENTER

Rosalyn George, MD

Wilmington Dermatology Center
910-256-4350 • wilmingtondermatologycenter.com

My Business: Wilmington Dermatology Center is focused on providing individualized care and superior results in a comfortable environment. We pride ourselves on offering the most up to date treatments and protocols to help people of all ages feel their best in their skin.

Words of Wisdom to Other Men/Women: Surround yourself with a great team and make sure they are appreciated and have a voice. Make sure to listen to them as well. I can't tell you the countless number of times we have been able to make our business better by listening to suggestions from our team.

Why I Chose This Career: I am so

fortunate to work in the field of medicine that I do. We get to make a meaningful impact on how people see themselves and how they are perceived in the world. There are so many exciting developments in dermatology, and we get to be on the forefront of those developments. Whether we are treating eczema, acne, psoriasis or getting someone ready for a big life event, we get to truly make a difference in people's lives. I also have a group of people that I get to work with everyday who share the same passion for educating people about the importance of skin health.

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: You won't be able to please everyone, and that is ok.

You'd Never Guess That: I love superhero movies.

Why I Love Doing Business In Wilmington: It is such a wonderful place to live and start a business. The community has been so welcoming and appreciative of the services we provide. It was also very valuable to be in a smaller town where you can truly build relationships with your clients who have become friends and be connected with all of the people that you need to run a business successfully. We still have relationships with the bankers and builders we originally worked with during our initial startup.

Why I Chose This Career:

Crafa: I love the entire process of construction and design. It is so rewarding to create aesthetically beautiful and functional spaces.

Smith: I love that I can make a living doing something I am passionate about, and I able to be creative on a daily basis.

You'd Never Guess That:

Crafa: I'm an introvert and a "tomboy" at heart and obsessed with wildlife!

Smith: I guess most people don't know that I was a Horticultural Therapist for adults with special needs for several years. Then, I went on to landscape design and specialized in annual and perennial plantings.

Why I Love Doing Business In Wilmington:

Crafa: I love the laid back vibe in Wilmington. Most everyone I've worked with here seems to have their priorities straight and know what's truly important in life.

Smith: Wilmington has it all...the small town vibe, historical architecture, the beach and all walks of life. Perfect place for a small business to grow and prosper.



Debra Hudson Crafa

**Coastal Cottage at Uptown Market
804-334-7500**

Paula Smith
**Province 19 at Uptown Market
910-520-4929**



Julie Crouch
Custom Home Furniture Galleries
910-799-4010
customhomestaginganddesign.com

My Business: I work as General Manager of Custom Home Furniture Galleries, as well as over see Marketing and Advertising for our sister stores, niche. by Custom Home, Custom Home Staging and Designs and Custom Home Sleep Shop.

Best Business Advice I Ever Received: The best business advice I have received is to treat people how you want to be treated. The Golden Rule!

Words of Wisdom to Other Men/Women: My word of advice to other Women in business especially those just starting out, is to always ask questions! Ask questions and learn. You will be surprised at how much information you will find out you didn't even know.

Why I Chose This Career: I chose this career because I am not a good "desk person". I love being able to have a hands on approach to the furniture store and other businesses and meeting people all across the industry.

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: One thing I have learned the hard way in the past year is when things start to get overwhelming, ask for help! Barbara Corcoran always says "a job done 80% as well as you would do it, is good enough", Delegation has been a challenge to me, but with how quickly this industry is growing and changing, it is necessary to adapt.



Vance Young
The Vance Young Team
Intracoastal Realty
910-232-8850
vanceyoung.com

My Business: Real Estate

Best Business Advice I Ever Received: Work hard, play hard and make history!

Words of Wisdom to Other Men/Women: Keeping your word by over delivering - being there through the good, the bad, and when least expected.

Why I Chose This Career: I started working as a stockbroker until the market crashed in '87. Around this time, Landfall was starting to be developed, and I was offered the position as an on-site agent.

Why I Love Doing Business In Wilmington: The size of the community is perfect. It's not too big, not too small. Your reputation will make or break you here.



My Business: A Lifestyle Boutique fulfilling your every coastal desire. We specialize in luxuries that women love both large and small.

Best Business Advice I Ever Received: The best advice I have received is to remember to focus on what I do best. The best I have will come as long as I have that focus.

Why I Chose This Career: I always loved working in retail when younger. And later in life after a long career in banking, an opportunity came along that offered me the ability to do this with my mom. Best decision ever!

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: I've learned that I can't do it all myself, no matter how hard I try. And yes, my mom does know a lot more than I do about almost everything!

Why I Love Doing Business In Wilmington: Wilmington is my favorite city! It has everything - the beach, the riverfront, the garden district, the university and great people! I wouldn't live or work anywhere else.



Pam Thibault
Crabby Chic
910-799-4216



Pete Peleuses
Great Outdoor
Provision Company
910-343-1648
greatoutdoorprovision.com

Words of Wisdom to Other Men/Women: Of course, pursue a career that genuinely makes you happy. Budget your time at work accordingly with family. Be a team player, it's imperative to have a good level of support from your coworkers. Lastly, say "Thank you" to your staff (I cannot emphasize this enough.).

Why I Chose This Career: I didn't choose it. It chose me. Twenty years ago, all my free time was spent climbing, backpacking, paddling and traveling. I found myself surrounded by like-minded individuals, and a few of the friends I made were already employed in the outdoor industry. I was encouraged to apply for an open position and I never looked back.

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: Don't rely solely on the technology utilized for your business. We have an amazing amount of resources available in retail, but inevitably, things will fail and you have to be prepared for those situations. Following hurricane Florence for almost a two-week period we were without phone lines, internet and a full staff. With no way to communicate outside and process transactions, we adapted and prevailed turning a potential loss into profit and provided customers with the equipment they needed.

You'd Never Guess That: A.) I spent my childhood in four different countries immersed in different cultures and languages. B.) I own over 500 vinyl records. C.) I have a 7-month-old Rottweiler puppy that has a taste for my kid's homework. D.) All of the above.



Nest Fine Gifts & Interiors

910-256-6378

nestfinegifts.com

(standing L to R) Marie Polak, Manager, Smith Hinton, Assistant Manager
(seated L to R) Suzanne Reid, Designer, Monika Williams, Owner, Rachel Hoenig, Designer

Our Business: A Home Interiors Boutique with full service interior design. Our business is also our hobby...we enjoy design work even when we're not in the store. It gets in your blood and can be consuming at times, but inspiration is everywhere so you never know when something will hit you.

Best Advice We have Ever Received: Try your best to keep a positive attitude, because owning a business can be very hard at times.

Words of Wisdom to other Men/Women: We've learned that

you can't please everyone; no matter how hard you try. You have to make the best decisions for your business, and usually your gut instincts are correct.

Why We Chose This Career: It's our passion. In the morning, we just get excited to do it all over again.

Why We Love Doing Business in Wilmington: We are so lucky to have a wonderful, enjoyable client base. We look forward to new clients, 100% always.

A woman with long, wavy brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a black top and a large, ornate necklace, is smiling and holding a pair of glasses. She is standing in a clothing store with various garments hanging in the background. A sign on a garment reads "HOLD FOR PHOTOSHOOT".

Julie Bell
Honeybee Fashion in Porters Neck
and Bumblebee Gifts in Surf City
910-319-7693
shopthebee.com

My Business: Is forever evolving! My focus is on amazing things that brighten our days – fashion, accessories and fun gift. But, as most of our customers say, “It’s never the same place twice.” Changes are in the works for us this year as we continue to plan 2019. It’s going to BEE our biggest year yet!

Words of Wisdom to Other Men/Women: Be Yourself! Life is messy, but I’ve made my closest friends and business partners by being transparent and solving real problems together. Hiding our imperfections also hides opportunities to joke about, bond over, and possibly fix problems with others.

One Thing I’ve Learned The Hard Way: I lost Bumblebee Gifts (our original location) in Surf City in Hurricane Florence. I had to BEE open-minded and figure out how to do something different to be successful. We have some major announcements coming up!

My Business: Debby Gomulka Designs, LLC is a lifestyle brand that specializes in meticulous style and quality with customized design services that fit each client's own vision. With over 18 years of professional interior design experience, my team and I provide a distinctive quality and luxury experience to sophisticated clients looking for an extraordinary quality of life. My interior design philosophy revolves around my clients, uncovering their wants and needs. The most exciting part of the design process is uncovering each client's vision. It's like a journey of discoveries, waiting to be peeled away, one layer at a time.

Best Business Advice I Ever Received: Do what you love, the money will follow.

Why I Chose This Career: From the time I was a child, I knew that I would become a designer. The real joy in this profession is being able to improve my client's quality of life. Lifelong friendships have flourished from interior design clients. For many of my clients, I have celebrated their life achievements, weddings, birthdays and anniversaries. It is definitely a fulfilling career.

One Thing I’ve Learned The Hard Way: Time management. Knowing when to speed up and slow down, getting that sense of pace from the client. Each project is unique and each has a budget and a deadline. Knowing that timing is key.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a red top and a patterned shawl, is smiling and standing in a room with red curtains. She is wearing a watch on her left wrist.

Debby Gomulka,
ASID Allied Member
Debby Gomulka Designs, LLC
910-352-733
debbygomulkadesigns.com



Jennifer Young

FreshNest Properties of Nest Realty Wilmington
910-547-2106 • nestrealty.com

My Business: My business is everything real estate. I work consistently with sellers and buyers of all types of properties, including the new construction market helping buyers connect with the right builder. Walking clients step-by-step through their new home purchase in this fast paced environment is important today more than ever. On the listing side, my expertise in sales and marketing helps sellers to prepare their property for a full marketing campaign - so to gain as much exposure in the market and negotiate the best deal possible. Today clients want an expert in the industry helping them understand what's next and what to expect when buying and selling. Helping my friends, new and past clients, and referrals with their specific real estate needs is what keeps me loving what I do.

Why I Chose This Career: It's a people business, it's real estate and it's sales. It is more of an emotional sale for most,

so it's like matchmaking, but with property. No deal is ever the same, and you never know what will be thrown your way, keeping you on your toes. There is no such thing as monotony in the life of a Realtor.

You'd Never Guess That: With my Texas accent and southern charm, I actually moved to Wilmington from Manhattan, NY. After years of working a very successful business to business sales career, I moved my focus full-time into NY real estate working with one of the top RE firms in the city...and no, it is not like the TV show!

Why I Love Doing Business In Wilmington: Our people, our city, our views, our sunsets, our beaches, our coastal lifestyle...I could go on forever. Wilmington is an amazing place to work, play and call home.



Peter Donat

Havana's Restaurant

910-458-2822

havanarestaurant.com

My Business: Havana's Restaurant is an American Restaurant—"polished casual" with an island flair—that serves the freshest seafood, steaks & pastas around. We're located in the heart of Carolina Beach, and atop the dining list of most locals and visitors. Havana's Executive Chef selects seafood, meats and produce daily from local vendors to create exciting menu options that are served at cozy inside booths and chair tables as well as the best outside seating in the area. A perfect choice for business lunches, special events or a casual night out, our guests always enjoy great food, service and atmosphere at Havana's in Carolina Beach!

Best Business Advice I Ever Received: Richard Branson: Take care of your employees, and they will always take care of your customers.

One Thing I've Learned The Hard Way: Get involved and invest in your community. The first couple of years I spent all my time working on day-to-day activities in the restaurant. Then I became actively involved in local groups like the Chamber of Commerce, Island Senior Center along with other business people to network to make our community better through local business. Havana's cannot be successful if we do not represent the spirit and energy of Carolina Beach!

Why I Love Doing Business In Wilmington: Serving the entire Wilmington area, Havana's Restaurant in Carolina Beach celebrated ten years of service in March! Hitting this milestone reminds me of how many good times our customers have had and I am thankful that we have made so many friends over the years. The Wilmington area is my home and I look forward to many more good relationships and opportunities to serve for many years to come.