The Edge: Taking a chance helped Titusville company find success

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(My husband Bryan and I call ourselves accidental business owners. While we share a love of vintage lighting and used to attend estate sales looking for antique lights to restore, we never imagined that we could create a company that sells vintage-inspired, hand-crafted lighting to customers around the globe.

When we had restored more lights than we could ever use in our own home, we started posting them on a simple web page and were amazed to discover that many people shared our passion.

Although we never intended to start our own business, we took a leap of faith and quit our full-time jobs to make lights here in Titusville. The economy in 2008 wasn't exactly the best environment to start a business, but we rented a small storefront in downtown to pursue our passion.

One of the most important lessons we learned is that our love for well-made, beautiful lighting fueled our success. No matter what you sell or what service you provide, you need to be passionate about it and take every opportunity to make it the best it can be.
We taught ourselves the long lost art of crafting porcelain enamel lighting because we knew it was the highest quality lighting we could make. We have found that consumers actively seek out well-made, quality products made in America, and since we are the only company in the U.S. manufacturing porcelain enamel lighting, our product definitely fills a niche.

Success did not come without our fair share of difficulties. One of the biggest problems we faced almost immediately was rapid growth. While some people might not see growth as a downside, we struggled with the logistics of hiring employees and finding more space while controlling costs and keeping up with orders.

We found, more than once, that we outgrew a new space far too quickly. We kept buying buildings but would be at full capacity the minute we moved in. That was frustrating.

The silver lining to the stagnant economy was the number of buildings in our community that were available to renovate. It wasn't always easy to retrofit a building to make it suitable for a manufacturing space, but it was more economical and had a positive impact on the community and surrounding properties. We have purchased and rehabbed four buildings in Titusville, two of which were blighted and sat empty for years.

And now, almost seven years after we first rented that storefront in downtown Titusville, Bryan and I have come full circle. Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated the grand opening of Playalinda Brewing Company after purchasing that very building and renovating it to house our brewery and tasting room.

Again, we did not have a long-term plan to be brewery owners. But Bryan is passionate about craft beer, so he did a lot of research, made some new friends in the industry, and tested the waters by creating a Facebook page to gauge the local interest. After one day, hundreds of likes on the page, and growing support, we couldn't let the community down.

The last 12 months have been a whirlwind of learning and preparation. While stressful at times, my best advice is to keep your sense of humor. And never let your other half create a Facebook page without telling you! Oh … and whatever you do, make sure you're passionate about it. If you are, you can't help but succeed.

Donna Scott is the co-owner of Barn Light Electric and Playalinda Brewing Co. Columnist series sponsored by the Women's Business Center at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. For more information, visit http://wbc.fit.edu/.