Alabama Outreach
A Newsletter of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network

Volume 4 Number 2
Summer/Fall 2004

AERN Hosts Training Sessions in Marengo and Dallas Counties

Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network staff led training programs in Selma and Demopolis in the past months.

On May 18, Paavo Hanninen, co-director of AERN, Paul Brothers and Todd Hines, both research librarians at the Bruno Business Library at the University of Alabama, provided hands-on training at the Selma/Dallas County Area Chamber of Commerce. About 10 Selma-area entrepreneurs attended. On July 1, the trio provided training for business people at the Demopolis Area Chamber of Commerce.

The training session at each location introduced attendees to the varied research materials available at each AERN center site. Attendees were able to ask questions about specific types of businesses and the University of Alabama experts suggested ways to conduct research related to those business areas.

“We addressed specific research questions from those in attendance,” Hanninen said. “There were several people with restaurant ideas as well as owners of existing restaurants who attended.” Hanninen said that others who have attended training sessions and recently used AERN resources were interested in starting a healthcare consultancy and an alterations shop.

“At the Entrepreneurial Summit, held at George Wallace Community College in Selma, I talked with a woman who attended our Selma training session,” Hanninen said. “Her healthcare consultancy business has been incorporated and she is now trying to drum up business.”

Those interested in starting or growing their business using the resources of AERN can contact Hanninen at the University of Alabama, 205/348-6191 or by e-mail at Phaninen@cba.ua.edu.

Selma Restaurant to Feature Southern Cooking To Go

Clif and Camille Deer are about to realize a dream. In September they plan to open a new restaurant in Selma — Mammy’s Real Home Cooking…To Go! The restaurant will be primarily take-out and delivery meat plus three fare.

The restaurant is named for Camille Deer’s great grandmother, Kathleen Denson. Her grandchildren knew her only as Mammy. “She was known by many in Selma as a true ‘Southern Lady’ and a wonderful Southern cook. I have her original handwritten cookbook and will be using many of her favorite recipes,” Camille said.

Clif is a contractor who has been constructing the restaurant on Highway 41 in Selma. The couple project an opening date in mid-September. The restaurant will be open over the noon hour Monday through Friday with a goal of serving lunch to employees at nearby and growing industrial parks.

“We expect our business to grow leaps and bounds considering all of the new industry in the two adjacent industrial parks and the news of new industry coming soon to the parks,” Camille said. “We are very excited about the news of new industry coming to the Craig Field Industrial and The South Dallas Industrial Park.” She said they plan to implement a delivery service to the industrial park employees soon after the restaurant opens.

“AERN was vital to our planning and development of our business plan,” Camille said. The Innovation Center in Selma directed the Deers to Selma’s Chamber of Commerce and suggested they use the business plan development software provided by AERN. “We had no idea how to put together a plan,” she said. “The software made it so simple! The wonderful people at our Chamber of Commerce made every attempt to make us comfortable and provided assistance in making us familiar

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Brandy Phillips was a student in the University of Alabama’s master’s program in geography when she first became acquainted with the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN). As a student she worked for AERN on the UA campus, now she’s working for an AERN affiliate organization, the Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Planning Commission.

As a graduate student in geography, Phillips worked with AERN building geographic information systems. “For the most part I worked in the counties doing census and demographic maps, portraying data from the member areas,” she explained. Her work as a student made it easier for AERN clients to visualize and understand data that are pertinent to their business or community.

In January 2004, Phillips joined the Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Planning Commission as principal planner. She prepares plans for 10 counties (Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Dallas, Marengo, Monroe, Perry, Sumter, Washington and Wilcox) and the municipalities in those counties. State and federal governments require certain plans from counties and cities. “Right now we’re working on hazard mitigation plans,” Phillips said. She also does some grant writing.

The resources of AERN provide data that are useful in planning business growth or writing grants for community improvement or developing government plans.

“The Deers, who do not have restaurant backgrounds, started the business because of Camille’s love of cooking and Southern food. Cliff is a former captain at the Selma Fire Department and is a self-employed builder. Camille is a stay-at-home mom. But, they saw a need and opportunity in the area for fast meals for the employees of the industrial parks and for local residents. “We will run the business and have careful control of the foods on our menu,” she said.

“Above all we give thanks to the Lord for making this possible. There is no doubt His hand has been guiding and provided the entire journey!,” Camille said. She also expressed appreciation for help from Selma’s Innovation Center, George Alford, Pioneer Electric, Judge Johnny Jones, Alabama Tombigbee Regional and AERN “for making our dream a reality!”

The Deers describe the menu as “Delicious fresh Southern fare in a convenient fast format.” Though the restaurant is focused primarily on carry-out and delivery, there are a few tables where patrons can be served in the restaurant.

The menu includes Southern and Denson family favorites such as Southern fried chicken, Tweedy’s chicken pot pie, smothered chicken on biscuits, honey dipped ham, Mammy’s famous dressing, real mashed potatoes, Southern turnip greens, cheesy squash casserole, Senator sweet potato casserole, tomato pie, Henley’s favorite chicken and dumplings, Pey Pey’s mac & cheese, steamed cabbage, hamburger steak and gravy, beef tips and rice, butter beans, fried corn, bread pudding with lemon curd sauce, buttermilk pie, blackberry cobbler and much more! The restaurant will offer three meats and six vegetables everyday. Meals will be served in the traditional meat plus three format. “We will focus on keeping our menu simple and truly Southern with every effort to have our food prepared from the freshest food possible,” Camille said. “No canned vegetables here!” she emphasized.

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A national television network dubbed one of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network’s (AERN) clients as having a “Recipe for Success” in a program televised this summer.

Jacky Poole, owner of Smokin’ Jack’s Barbecue in Demopolis, was featured on the Food Network’s “Recipe for Success” series in early June. Poole used the resources offered by AERN through the Demopolis Chamber of Commerce to start up his business.

Marlie Hall, host of “Recipe for Success,” noted that barbecuing is a great American pastime, but it is more than a pastime for Poole. Hall said, “In a small southern town, barbecue helped change a man’s life and one community’s heart.”

Poole, a former factory worker, opened his business in January 2004 and has been met with tremendous support from the community. Local bankers, business people and Poole’s employees were all interviewed and unanimously voiced their support of and appreciation for Poole’s efforts.

Poole knew barbecue before starting his business. He and a team of friends competed in and won weekend barbecue competitions on a regular basis for about a decade, according to the program. “I loved his ribs,” said banker Dan Wilson.

“I’ve seen a lot of start-ups in my years,” said Poole’s friend and landlord Ben Sherrod. “Nobody could have anticipated what went on here…in the first week, the first month. Nobody could anticipate it.”

But Poole increased his chances for success by laying a strong foundation. The segment noted that Poole did his homework before starting his business, using the research resources of AERN. Host Marlie Hall said, “Jacky also took advantage of a program offered through the chamber of commerce and the local university offering free start-up advice to entrepreneurs.” His research paid off. Smokin’ Jack’s Barbecue had surpassed its financial estimates for six months by the end of the first month, according to the program.

When asked about his staff, Poole told the host, “The good Lord brought them to us and I’m very thankful they’re here.” He continued, “I’m supposed to do this. This is where my life is supposed to be—cooking.”

Poole went from factory worker to restaurateur. And when he was featured on national television, he credited AERN with some help along that route.
Selma Woman Wants to Sew Up Alterations Market

Georgia Shannon decided to set a new career track after she retired from teaching in 1999. She began doing alterations, tailoring and custom home furnishings from her home in Selma that year. She is now using the resources of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network (AERN) in an effort to expand Georgia’s Fashions into a full-time business.

“When I think about it, my desire as I get further along in my plan is to have several employees,” Shannon said. She hopes to have enough business to eventually employ people to do alterations, sew window treatments, tablecloths, bedding, tailored suits, wedding attire, neckties, and run embroidery machines. “Starting out it will be me and part-time people; then we’ll just go on from there.”

Georgia Shannon (seated) is assisted by Tina Price, administrative assistant, Selma & Dallas County Chamber of Commerce. Price is the contact for AERN clients when they need assistance in building a business plan.