

GRINDSTONE

ISSUE 01: FEBRUARY 2021

Kneading the Dough

At Main and Mulberry, we know that small businesses are a big deal in small towns. This series, the Grindstone, focuses on a backbone of the US economy: the small businesses who are creating new jobs and driving innovation with hard work and determination. We'll hear from business owners and operators about everything from success stories to what it really means to keep your nose to the grindstone.

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EXCLUSIVE DIGITAL CONTENT



David Pippin, owner
of 3 Guys Pizza Pies
prepping the dough
for a rockin' new
pizza in Collierville,
Tennessee

David Pippin

3 GUYS PIZZA

David Pippin, owner of local restaurant 3 Guys Pizza Pies, knows small business. In fact, he knows the other side of the coin, too. Having worked for national arcade and pizza chain, Chuck E. Cheese for 25 years, he offers unique insight into what it looks like to make the transition from being a corporate employee to running your own business.

Recalling his time with Chuck E. Cheese, Pippin says that it was a great learning experience, where he was able to hold a lot of different positions and be part of a large growth period. “As the corporation got bigger, we had a little less autonomy, and you know, I kind of felt like I had been an entrepreneur at heart for my whole life, but just had yet to really take the big step to go out and do my own thing,” remembers Pippin.

When he came across the opportunity to acquire an existing restaurant that he could rebrand to his own, he knew it was time to make a decision. “You just get to a point where you have to decide: I’m going to do this. And I’m prepared as I can be. Or, I’m going to let this dream go and focus here, or on another dream. I was at a point where I’d read everything I had read, and had done my homework. So, we jumped in and it was a learning experience,” Pippin says.

There are an abundance of fears and



obstacles to not only starting your own business, but keeping it running. While we often see success stories, we don’t always hear what keeps small business owners up at night, stressed, while they are trying to make it. “I think the biggest thing is the fear of not being able to meet your commitments to your family,” says Pippin. “Next is not being able to meet your financial commitments to your employees... that’s a tremendous amount of pressure. And when I stepped out, I had a younger daughter.”

From building up to your former income, generating income consistently, paying your bills, providing for your family, etc., it speaks volumes that one of Pippin’s biggest stresses starting out was fulfilling his commitment to his employees.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD PIZZERIA

Pippin opened 3 Guys Pizza Pies, a full-service pizza restaurant, on HWY 64 in Lakeland, TN in 2010. They celebrated their ten year anniversary in August. The idea for 3 Guys Pizza Pies, says Pippin, is family-focused. “We want to be the neighborhood pizzeria where you go after the ball game or the soccer game, whatever the event is, and you’re comfortable bringing in the whole family,” he said. They have beer on draft and lots of TVs on the walls too, as well as arcade games to keep the kids having fun while you enjoy the game.

After seeing success in Lakeland, Pippin ventured out into Southaven, MS before opening stores in Cordova and Collierville. “We’ve since closed the one in Cordova, but Collierville is still alive and well, and the other



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two [Lakeland and Southaven] are as well," says Pippin. If you haven't had the pleasure of dropping by one of their locations yet, they have a wider range of menu options including pizza, subs, salads, wings, and calzones, a lot of which is made fresh.

"A lot of our food is cooked and processed right in-house. In particular, our dough. We make our dough everyday... flour, water, yeast, sugar, just the basics like that. We grate our own cheese from 40 lb blocks. Meats, we cook in-house. We don't buy bag products to put on the pizzas. Cooking them in-house allows us to buy the product at a commodity level which is cheaper, and it also results in just a fresher tasting product," says Pippin.

SUSTAINABILITY DURING COVID-19

The pandemic, of course, has affected 3 Guys Pizza Pies just like so many other small businesses in Shelby County. When asked about today's difficulties, Pippin describes it as adjustments and pivots: "At first, the thought process was, are we going to be able to stay open, just from a government regulation [standpoint], and is the public going to be buying pizza? What are we going to do about the employees? These people have families and commitments. We were fortunate; we saw pretty quickly that people would call us and they'd come pick up the pizza - they didn't have to eat inside. So that helped quite a bit. Then, it seems like overnight, we went from 'Are we going to be able to keep the employees busy?' to 'We don't have enough employees to source product.'" As COVID-19 has affected supply chains, many restaurants have reported having difficulty locating products that would normally be a non-issue; in Pippin's case - pepperoni and beef. Fluctuating prices have been an issue, as well. "Cheese prices at first, they went



David Pippin, owner of 3 Guys Pizza Pies prepping the dough for a rockin' new pizza in Collierville, Tennessee

down, then they tripled, now they're kind of pulling back," explains Pippin.

When asked about the sustainability of continuing to operate business through the varying phases of capacity restrictions and curbside pickup, Pippin reinforces their family-focused model and says that restaurants still need customers to dine-in. "We have people coming into the restaurants and dining, and that's fantastic. That's what we need," says Pippin. "We are seeing as many people as we can during our peak times, but it's just not something that can really sustain us for a long period, I don't think. Eventually, this environment of not going out to eat with your family, especially if you



have three or four kids, which almost immediately [puts the restaurant] over the size limit that the government wants in one place... there's going to be an impact on the industry."

INGRAINED IN THE COMMUNITY

Being ingrained in the community as "the neighborhood pizzeria" has been a blessing for 3 Guys Pizza Pies during the pandemic, as well as being part of the small business community. Pippin recognizes that many locals want to dine where they know they are comfortable versus a chain restaurant. "I think we do have an advantage of people feeling like this is their local pizza place, and to folks that are

coming in, they are their neighbors," says Pippin. "And, I'll tell you, there's a lot of support amongst the small business community. While this [has been going on], the tips people would leave our servers... it's pretty amazing how people [are] reaching in and digging deep for them. We had at least one gentleman [who] came by a store and said, 'Hey, look, we've been fans of y'all from the beginning and we want to donate a little bit of money' – it was heartwarming. It's touching. I'm grateful for it, you know, I do have pretty much my whole family wrapped up in this thing."

The community support that 3 Guys Pizza Pies has received throughout

the pandemic is a testament to their success. Small businesses depend on community support, and if there's anything we've learned through the pandemic, it's that locals care about small businesses. And their favorite local pizza joint.

GRINDSTONE

To listen to our full podcast interview with David Pippin, Owner of 3 Guys Pizza, visit MainandMulberry.com.

story | AUSTIN ESSARY

THE MAIN FEED

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The Secret Coast

Erin Rosetti of Coastal Mississippi opened our eyes to the state's "laid back coastal culture" as she discusses 12 distinct communities across 62 miles of shoreline.

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Beach Blvd
Lighthouse on the
coast of Mississippi
courtesy of Coastal
Mississippi



Perhaps now more than ever, we need an escape within a day's reach of Shelby County. Often overlooked and referred to as The Secret Coast, is a stretch of 62 miles of Mississippi coastline only six hours away. The stretch boasts of twelve coastline communities, each with a distinct flavor and unique offerings. From art, relaxing on the beach, gaming, breweries, and of course, seafood, Coastal Mississippi is sure to have a community suited for your ever-changing list of getaway requirements. Main and Mulberry was able to catch up with Erin Rossetti, the Director of Communications and Engagement for Coastal Mississippi, to provide insight on all The Secret Coast has to offer.

Coastal Mississippi represents the lower three counties of Mississippi, stretching from the state line of Louisiana to the state line of Alabama, and Rossetti assures us there is plenty to do within those borders. "Each of our communities is distinct from the next... You still have that atmosphere of laid back coastal culture, but at the



"[The Mississippi Aquarium] is an incredible facility where you can go and learn all about our ecosystem here and how we're protecting the Gulf of Mexico, which is such a vital resource to so many... so we're excited to have that in our backyard"

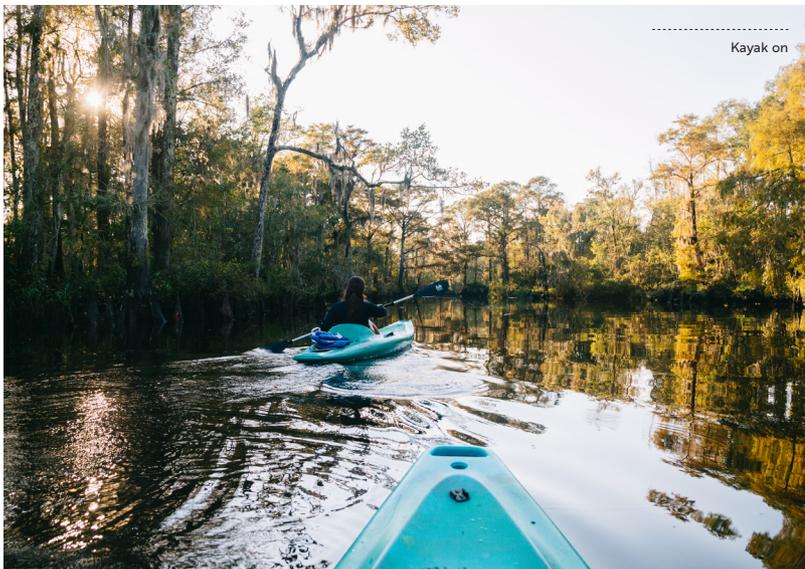
same time, you can really experience something unique in every city that you go to. Two of our really popular destinations are Bay St. Louis [on the] West side of our region, and then of course you have Ocean Springs toward the East side. And we call those our bookends in a way, because they're both very creative and artistic and there's a lot of galleries and just things to do related to the arts and that creative economy. So those are very distinct in their own right," she says.

However, you'd be remiss to skip over the towns just outside of those bookends as well, such as Waveland, the only community on the Gulf coast that prohibits commercial buildings

on its beachfront, and Gautier on the East side, where you can be book an interactive tour via kayak through the Pascagoula River marsh. In between the artsy towns of Bay St. Louis and Ocean Springs are two of the largest cities within the region, Biloxi and Gulfport. "Biloxi is well known for its gaming, and so is Gulfport, but they're both equally known for [their] seafood industry," says Rossetti.

When thinking of the coast, the obvious thing that comes to mind is enjoying the beach. While there are limitless options to enjoy the man-made beaches, and even the natural barrier islands (we'll get to those!), The Secret Coast has many other attractions and activities to add to your list. One of the newest and most exciting is the brand new Mississippi Aquarium in Gulfport, where you can (safely!) hang out with alligators, penguins, and soon, dolphins!

"[The Mississippi Aquarium] is an incredible facility where you can go and learn all about our ecosystem here and how we're protecting the Gulf of Mexico, which is such a vital resource to so many... so we're excited to have that in our backyard, and I know I plan to go and do yoga in front of the huge tank where you can see all the fish," says Rossetti. The aquarium will be hosting events there too, such as beer tastings. Years and years in the making, the Mississippi Aquarium is a must-add to your list of things to see while at the MS Coast.



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2.3832" X 8.25"

Before we go any further, beer was mentioned, and there are quite a few breweries to check out as well! Also located in Gulfport, Chandeleur Island Brewing Company features a tap room open seven days a week, where you can test out their Lil' Miss Tangerine Sour or Freemason golden ale, among other tasty brews. Be sure to check before you go, as they might be offering brewery tours that you can book in advance. Then hop over to Ocean Springs, where Fort Bayou Brewing Company serves Cajun-inspired dishes and brews in The Cypress Taphouse overlooking a koi pond. Rossetti assures that the breweries and other attractions are taking every precaution necessary, saying,

“You can drink your way through the Coast in a really safe way.”

Perhaps you're looking for a gambling adventure, or an all-inclusive experience at a casino resort. The Secret Coast boasts a vibrant gaming industry with beautiful resort properties that are doing their due diligence during the pandemic. Rossetti says, “Our casino resorts are just immaculate... If you want to come here just to be on a resort property, you're going to have endless experiences on that resort property. One of the most well known properties is MGM owned, the Beau Rivage, and it is well known for its accommodations and entertainment... Obviously with [COVID-19], it's inhibited a lot of things, but [our properties] are doing every human thing they can do to make sure your experience is very similar to pre-COVID. Keeping everyone safe and healthy and encouraging that accountability and best practices and your health. But at the same time, they want people to be able to come and enjoy what they have to offer at each property.”



If you're looking to enjoy your resort experience in Gulfport instead of Biloxi, be sure to check out the Gulf from Island View Casino and Resort.

At this point, you might be wondering why Coastal Mississippi is referred to as The Secret Coast. We know for sure that it is not for its lack of beaches and outdoor adventures! Of the 62 miles that make up the coastline of the Mississippi mainland, 26 of those miles make up the longest man-made beach in the world, with plenty of room to roam. The sand was dredged from the Mississippi Sound, which Rossetti explains “is the body of water that is in between the mainland beach area and our Gulf Islands National Seashore, or our barrier islands.” There are a number of islands you can visit off the coast, such as Cat Island and Ship Island, which you can ferry out to in roughly forty minutes. Other islands include Horn Island and Petit Bois. On those islands, you might run into some fishermen and others enjoying the area recreationally, but it's a great



way to get off the grid.

With the Mississippi Sound in the middle, it makes the man-made beaches on the mainland calmer than at your typical Gulf destination, while the natural beaches offshore on the barrier islands give you the full Gulf experience. The Mississippi Sound is also one of the reasons their seafood industry thrives. “It acts as a safe haven for our seafood, which is fabulous because it means that we have an incredible seafood offering. And it also protects those animals from larger predators... We are very fortunate to have it,” says Rossetti.

In addition to its coastal beaches, the area also features the Pascagoula River, where you can enjoy the museum and take interactive tours via boat or kayak. “You can kayak our waterways really easily, and we have several vendors that allow for that,” says Rossetti. Of course, the fishing opportunities are endless - whether you fancy inshore, offshore, salt, or fresh. “You can enjoy a different outdoor experience for every hour of the day here. We’re very fortunate that way,” says Rossetti.

One thing that we cannot forget to mention is the wonderful art scene that Coastal Mississippi has to offer. While there are many museums and galleries, the top on our list is their beloved Walter Anderson Museum of Art. One of the most well known artists from the region, the museum in downtown Ocean Springs is dedicated to his works and life. According to Rossetti, Anderson was known for canoeing out to Horn Island during big storms, even staying out there, to truly capture the essence of the Buffalo Island National

Seashore. The museum contains all of his mint condition works for which he was so well known.

Now that you know all the things to do, it’s time to talk about accommodations. With the pandemic, travel accommodations can be a little tricky. Coastal Mississippi has three brand new properties opening this fall. Rossetti says, “We’ve got three that are upcoming, one located in downtown Biloxi called Hotel Legends that opens October 1st. We also have a really cool offering in [Downtown] Ocean Springs called the Beat Neck and it includes four chalets, so you have your individual chalet and there’s a pool there. And then there is also a boutique property opening in downtown Bay St. Louis, so you’re in quick walking distance to the old town, all of the shops, experiences, bars, and restaurants.” As always, they have more traditional hotels with Hampton and Hilton properties, if you prefer that route or are taking a shorter trip.

Whether it be for relaxation, adventure, seafood, are all of the above, the Secret Coast offers the perfect getaway for any visitor - especially those in Shelby County who are within a day’s reach. For more information on Coastal Mississippi, visit gulfcoast.org for interactive maps of the area, more activities, accommodations, and even secret facts about The Secret Coast!

MAIN FEED

To listen to our full podcast interview with Erin Rossetti, Director of Communications and Engagement for Coastal Mississippi, visit MainandMulberry.com.