

Small Business Development Center at UCF



TJ's Seafood Shack



Brothers Tim and Mike Shepardson, and their sister, Mary Strickland, launched their Oviedo franchise, My Girlfriend's Kitchen, during 2006 with expectations of being profitable within one year of opening. Nationally, the meal preparation business had received wide appeal across affluent, two-income households; and the franchisor seemed to be a logical fit for the three family members.

In early 2008, managing partner, Tim, approached the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Seminole Community College in Oviedo seeking to gain clearer understanding as to why the venture was not hitting its revenue projections. Certified Business Analyst, Robert Goetz, met with Tim and reviewed key performance indicators for the year and half old business. It was determined that while the local demographic profile tightly matched the recommended franchise model, population density was inadequate for creating and sustaining such a venture. Perhaps a larger city, but relocating the business was not a viable option for the family.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you! You guys (SBDC at SCC) truly know small business and are just the best!"

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Working closely with SBDC, Tim and Mary set out to remake and reposition their business to appeal to a wider audience. They began researching the local market, specifically with keen focus on identifying an eatery with underserved market potential. It was soon determined that there was no casual, low cost seafood eatery in the Oviedo – Winter Springs area. After several planning meetings with the SBDC, the owners decided that they would shut down My Girlfriend's Kitchen for several months while remodeling and installing new kitchen equipment and fixtures. Additional owner investment of \$90,000 was secured. Good landlord communication bought them several months rent free during this critical "no revenue" rebuilding phase. SBDC further advised the owners on the value of a low cost / high return marketing program. TJ's Seafood Shack opened for business in November 2008. The eatery is currently profitable with a vastly improved financial position. Eight, at risk, jobs were retained and three new ones added.

Helping Businesses Start, Grow and Succeed