

Magic Ink Artisans

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Gary Gillstedt
Magic Ink Artisans

From a career CPA to a temporary tattoo retailer, Gary Gillstedt’s entrepreneurial success is no ordinary story...Gary had been working as a CPA for a construction company in Michigan where one of his major clients happened to be involved with construction efforts on the France and Canada pavilions for the Epcot® project at the Walt Disney World® Resort. During the six months of working onsite in Orlando with the client and visiting Florida on more than a few vacation trips with his family, Gary became acquainted with a business owner who was seeking to sell his well-established venture. In December 1999, Gary decided to purchase the five-year-old business, Magic Ink Artisans – a retail service specializing in applying temporary tattoos on visitors at local theme parks.

With a steady market demand, Gary’s newly acquired temporary tattoo service continued to grow at a steady pace until the disaster of September 11, 2001. Tourism to Orlando declined sharply and Magic Ink Artisan’s sales in September and October were down by 85% and showed no signs of recovery. Within just a few months, Gary could no longer draw a salary for himself, fell behind on his installment payments to the seller and depleted his saving and credit line.

Suffering from a severe cash crunch, Gary sought technical assistance from the Small Business Development Center at UCF in January 2002. The SBDC’s Eunice Choi met with Gary and helped him obtain the SBA’s Economic Injury Disaster Loan. For Gary, it was the right move at the right time, and within a very short period the economy and business in general took a turn for the better.

“I do not feel very much like a success story that I want to shout off mountaintops about it as much as I feel sympathy and remorse for all of my fellow vendors in the theme park industry who did not make it,” Gary said, when reflecting on that period of his career.

Since receiving the disaster loan, Gary has continued to seek business consulting services from the SBDC at UCF. To this day, Eunice Choi as served as a mentor and provided third party opinions as Gary worked to strengthen and expand his business. The SBDC assistance Gary received ignited his philanthropic perspective. When Eunice Choi asked Gary to serve on the Entrepreneur Advisory Board of the Disney Entrepreneur Center, he agreed immediately to help his entrepreneur peers. “Simply,” Gary said, “I would not have survived without the SBDC’s help. I would like to repay the community.”

It’s been almost a decade since Gary’s dream of owning his own business inspired him to make a move from the mid-west to the sunshine state. Today, Magic Ink Artisans has 11 kiosk locations across Walt Disney World® Resort including Animal Kingdom, Blizzard Beach, Disney Hollywood Studios, Downtown Disney, and Typhoon Lagoon. Gary’s insatiable innovative spirit has led him to add a new line of interactive guest service. In May 2009, after more than a year of extensive research and development, Gary invested in BeadforLife, a project which sells beads made from recycled paper by Ugandan women. Gary was inspired by the eco-friendly and philanthropic message of BeadforLife and introduced the fun of stringing African beads into bracelets and necklaces to his current product mix. With this new project and working in tangent with Disney, Gary’s company is poised to enter the global market.