

Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar in Willoughby, Ohio

A success story written by Angela Clements Cattell

Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar is a franchised business with over 25 locations. According to the website, "Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar has over 30 REAL fruit smoothies to choose from and every one of them comes with one free enhancer. You can also create your own custom fruit and veggie juice combo at one of our 25 convenient locations." In addition, some stores offer wheatgrass shots, Veggies 'n Greens smoothies, wraps and salads.

Before owning a Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar, Michael McLaughlin was the director of sales and a former investor of nine years at a local wire and cable company. Towards the end of his employment at his previous occupation, he would frequent the local Pulp store at lunch time. He loved the little juice bar and became even more intrigued by a franchise opportunity. At that same time, he was becoming more dissatisfied at his former job as management and the dynamics of the business began to change. By 2015, the wire and cable company was sold and Michael was about to begin his new career.

Michael had met with the Pulp franchisor and a few of the other franchise owners including the owner of the Pulp in Macedonia where he received some essential guidance and support. However, he still needed some more specific business management assistance. In October of 2015, Michael registered online for business counseling at the Ohio Small Business Development (SBDC) at Lakeland Community College and first met with SBDC Business Advisor, Jim Gray. In his initial counseling session with Jim, they discussed due diligence and financing. Although Michael had enough capital to buy his business outright, Jim encouraged him to look into a low interest rate business loan for part of the acquisition and for working capital and provided a couple of financial institutions to contact. Getting a low interest rate loan instead of using all of your savings to buy a business can help with your business credit rating and give you leverage if you choose to expand later. Plus, having reserves is always a good idea in times of business hardships.

As explained by Michael, "Jim went through a checklist regarding marketing, business plans and financing." Jim then advised Michael to attend one of the free monthly On BASE Start-up Business Training Seminars presented and instructed by the Ohio SBDC at Lakeland Community College, which he did later that same week.

Jim Gray continued to follow up with Michael McLaughlin all along his search for loans, and while he completed his franchising documents. Eventually, Michael was able to secure a loan at Huntington Bank where his Mother was a longtime customer. By having a good relationship with your bank, you will be considered a highly valuable customer and have access to better interest rates and loan terms, fewer fees and just a higher level of customer service.

Throughout his start up process, Michael had many questions for Jim including information about vendor's licenses, sales tax and bookkeeping. Jim advised on any item he could and referred Michael to many resources to help with any gaps. According to Michael, when his frustrations grew due to delays in receiving his opening documents, Jim was very supportive. As described by Michael, "Jim Gray is the salt of the earth".

Finally, on August 24, 2016, Michael McLaughlin's Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar opened in Willoughby, Ohio. Within weeks of opening, Michael contacted Jim and expressed, "Well I am finally open and we are doing very well. Business has been great, and I am finding out what I need as I go and getting help."



Photo of the exterior of Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar located in Willoughby, Ohio

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Jim and Michael met again in October 2016 to discuss overall assistance with hiring, workers compensation, bookkeeping and marketing. The store was already exceeding projected sales. Jim and Michael later followed up in November of 2016 to examine Michael's business activities since opening. He discussed the amazing acceptance from the community and customers, relations with vendors, and working with his young staff. He emphasized the very low turnover in employees. He also asked about additional SBDC training opportunities, which Jim provided.



Photo of the interior of Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar in Willoughby, Oh

Since opening his store, Michael McLaughlin has created 15 part time and full time jobs including one for himself. He has exceeded all records for Pulp in sales. Michael has made an exceptional social media footprint with his great marketing plan. He has become a great addition to the community and sponsors four different children's baseball teams. He recently bought a food truck and plans on expanding into local events and private parties by the spring of 2018.

His advice to other entrepreneurs is "be organized and understand that this is your job for the next two years. Prepare to work hard. And research as much as you can." The SBDC is an amazing resource when you first start your research and will be there to support and guide you as your business grows helping you to achieve small business success.



Photo of Michael McLaughlin, owner of Pulp Juice and Smoothie Bar in Willoughby, Oh. To find out more information about his store, go to: www.facebook.com/WilloughbyPulp/