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Staff entrepreneurs

Business ventures keep many staff members busy after hours

BY MICHELLE HERSHMAN, L'07

University of Richmond employees are an ambitious bunch, with numerous staff members devoting their days to Richmond and nights and weekends to entrepreneurial endeavors.

Becka Boyd, interactive art director in Marketing Communications, works full time at the University while maintaining a jewelry business she started seven years ago. Rebecka Boyd Jewelry Design sells handmade jewelry consisting of hand-formed and shaped wire with beads interspersed for color.



Becka Boyd uses an old stump and hand tools to craft her custom jewelry.

"I enjoy creating things with my hands," said Boyd who sells her jewelry locally to stores like Pink, Confetti and Bella. "I started making jewelry for my family and friends. I kept getting positive feedback so I thought if they like it, maybe other people will too."

Currently, she works only with her husband, but she expects to hire a sales associate soon to deal with growing orders. The Boyds work out of their home but are considering renting a garage to provide a larger workspace.

Boyd consistently works 15–20 hours per week on top of her full-time job at Richmond. Working full time and handling a growing business is tough, but she has learned to set priorities and manage her time wisely.

"It's sometimes stressful," she said. "When I first got into the business, I really didn't know what I was getting myself into. You have to decide whether you want this as a hobby or whether you want to make money."

Boyd believes the business provides a good contrast with her University job.

"At Richmond, I sit at a desk a lot and participate in a lot of meetings," she said. "With my business, I get to use my hands instead of my brain. It's a different kind of application, and they complement each other."

Also in the jewelry business, Debbie Hardy and Linda Evans of University Communications sell the Premier Designs line of fashion jewelry through home parties.

Cheryl Richards, a full-time programmer-analyst in Information Services/ Administrative Systems, owns Painted Dreams Ranch in Hadensville, Va. Richards' love for horses started as a child. Coupled with her husband's history in the rodeo, they decided they had a solid background for raising horses.

"Our horses are bred for performance and pleasure from bloodlines proven to produce versatile horses with great

dispositions," Richards said. "I've always loved horses, and paints are beautiful. Most paints are easy to train."

Her husband works on the ranch full time, while Richards works around her University schedule. Richards says she has no trick or timesaver for working full time and owning a business other than getting up early each morning.

"I love doing it, and it keeps me active," she said. "Plus, it's what my husband and I do together."

Eric Madden, a full-time University gardener, owns and operates his own Christian martial arts school, Breakthrough Christian Taekwondo University Inc.

Madden started the school about five years ago, and he now is a second-degree black belt. His interest started when he met the highest-ranked Taekwondo couple in the world.

The school had been meeting twice a week at Madden's church in Midlothian but opened at a new location in Highland Springs in May. With work, church and teaching Taekwondo, Madden is always busy, but he said caring about the people and loving what he does make it easy.

Melvin Gray, who works in the IS data center in Millhiser, has been in the power-wash business for a number of years. His Mel's Power Wash cleans houses, decks and fences throughout the Richmond region.

Larry Reynolds, concessions manager at Tyler's Grill, has owned his own painting business for 30 years. He recently partnered with his daughter, Jennifer Reynolds-Garcia, to form Distinctive Home Interiors. They offer interior design services, home organization, painting and antique sales.

Brenda Blanks, a business administration assistant in the Robins School of Business and a University employee since 1991, owns Classic Screen Printing & Embroidery.

"I have been in business for about five years, and it has given me an opportunity to meet a lot of the students and employees," she said. "I enjoy coming up with designs. It is a very satisfying career."

Daniel Hocutt is a freelance Web developer in addition to his part-time staff job and adjunct faculty position with the School of Continuing Studies. He focuses primarily on designing and maintaining sites for authors, schools and nonprofit organizations that focus on reading and literacy.

Some staff members have found ways to combine their connection to the University and their businesses.

Boyd participates in get-togethers with sororities, where she sets up a booth to showcase and sell her jewelry.

A licensed University vendor, Blanks provides several campus clubs and departments with screen printing, embroidery, digitizing, heat press services, names and numbers for athletic wear, and monogramming.

Boyd would like to create a connection among University entrepreneurs by starting a networking group for all Richmond staff members who own businesses.

"I met another staff member and found out he owned a business," Boyd said. "We thought it would be cool to start networking and talk to other people who own their own businesses so we can help each other out."

If you have questions or comments about RichmondNow or would like to submit story ideas or calendar information, please e-mail the editor at RichmondNow@richmond.edu.