

THE LOCAL REVIEW

a bi-monthly newsletter created by SHS students for their community

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Math Tutoring that Makes Sense

by Jack Garrity

Struggling with math homework in the Farmington Valley? Look no further than Matt Chmielewski, the math tutor behind the local business MC Tutoring. Chmielewski offers 60 minute tutoring sessions on everything from elementary school math to high school geometry to college-level calculus. He even offers preparation for the math sections of the SAT and ACT college entrance exams.

Chmielewski has spent the last 22 years and over 25,000 hours tutoring local students. When he was a kid growing up in East Granby, however, he never expected to become a tutor, let alone a math tutor. Chmielewski never was a math wiz in his youth. In high school, he developed a love of math when an inspirational teacher encouraged him to work harder in the subject. Chmielewski decided to become a math major in college, which is where he discovered

his skills as a tutor. At first, Matt had no interest in signing up for a campus tutoring job because after all, “[he] could barely understand the material [himself]!” His advisor convinced him to take the job, letting him know it was the “highest paying job on campus.” The rest is history.

Chmielewski became incredibly popular at the campus tutoring center at the University of Maine, so much so that he took up tutoring local students when he moved back to Connecticut after college in 2001. The demand was so high that Chmielewski decided to quit his full-time finance position in 2010 to take on as many students as possible. He has seen many advantages of working for himself. The “flexibility [to set his own hours] is huge,” says Chmielewski, who balances tutoring duties with parenting four young kids at home. On the other hand, when a paycheck isn't guaranteed every week, a hard work ethic is the needed factor with which Chmielewski has credited his success as an entrepreneur.



Another downside of owning a small business is dealing with unpredictable interruptions. A major interruption for entrepreneurs around the world this year has been the COVID-19 pandemic. I asked Chmielewski how he has adapted to the changes the health crisis has brought to the tutoring industry. Luckily, he's doing pretty well. Chmielewski had been perfecting

the art of "distance tutoring" for years, as his list of college clients grew. When the pandemic made in-person tutoring unfeasible for most students, Chmielewski was able to go "pretty much seamlessly into about 95% virtual tutoring." He uses a program called GroupBoard, which allows him to write out math problems like a teacher would on a whiteboard. Although Chmielewski admits that online tutoring is not quite as good as being in person, he says that "it's pretty close" to the real thing.

Chmielewski has credited his popularity with students to his relatability. When a student is struggling with a subject, he can easily put himself in their shoes because he once struggled too and has consequently developed his own unique ways of learning tricky math concepts. Chmielewski's goal as a tutor is to "become that teacher I wish I had when I was in high school to explain that stuff." To put it simply, he "explains math like a normal person." When it comes to finding a great tutoring experience in the Farmington Valley, MC Tutoring is the way to go.

Finding Stability in a Changing Environment

by Ben Antonetti

In a dynamic world, where both preferences and needs are seemingly always changing, one finds security in being able to easily adapt and pivot.



Popover Bistro & Bakery owner Pam Paydos understands this idea very well. After owning The Iron Frog Tavern for four years, she chose to open the health-conscious and locally-sourced restaurant in 2014 to fill a community need. At the time, there were few available day-time sandwich lunch options, and even fewer which were gluten free.

With an emphasis on customer satisfaction and community engagement, Popover Bistro & Bakery is the only place in town that offers breakfast all day long. It has also defined itself as comfortable, homey, and with a unique vibe.

Yet, that is not to say owning a restaurant comes without its difficulties.

As it has been for many other businesses, this year was a challenge. At first, nobody was sure what to do to keep their business afloat. However, through a flexible approach, Paydos revised her model to find success in dramatically different conditions. She initially modified the restaurant into a grocery store to create an alternative safe environment for those in the community who did not want to go to a larger, riskier place for necessities. Then, she adjusted her restaurant that was 95% dine-in into one that is now 75% take-out to increase safety assurance. Inevitable and unpredictable challenges, while not always to the magnitude of COVID-19, force one to maneuver through the obstacle course which is managing and financing a business. While success may be defined one way at the start of a venture, at some point, success might just be qualified as keeping your business alive. But by maintaining motivation, and implementing unexpected solutions to defy unforeseen problems, one finds stability in an ever-changing environment.

Paydos acknowledges that the job is never finished. Yes, there will likely be more unanticipated complications in the near future, and attracting multifaceted and talented employees can be difficult, especially now. Nevertheless, she stays optimistic as she appreciates her ability to create happiness for the community she belongs to. So, should you be questioning where to go for breakfast, lunch, or brunch, look no further than the health-sensitive, welcoming, and delicious Popover Bistro & Bakery.



A Gluten Free World

by Melissa Gallagher

A gluten free world at the click of a button-- that's what gluten free wife and mother Abby Helman Kelly envisioned when she struggled to find food she could enjoy without worrying about her gluten allergy.

After earning a bachelor's degree in Communications from Boston University and a master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Loyola University Maryland, Kelly briefly worked as a counselor, until meeting her husband and

starting a family. Having kids widened her eyes on gaps in the retail industry and her desire to fulfill authentic community needs. “I’ve always had business ideas, but never thought I’d actually follow through,” Kelly disclosed. For some ideas, she would get as far as naming the company, but it was not until all four of her kids were in school that she finally pursued entrepreneurship rather than returning to counseling. It was a night in 2016, when she finally got fed up with the limited gluten free dining options, and knew she was not alone in this struggle. “I had to do research every time my husband and I went out to dinner,” Kelly told me. “So I decided to create a hyper-local website and directory to help others like myself.” Thus, Gluten Free Connecticut was born.

Just 6 months after the launch of the business, Kelly organized her first expo in the ballroom of a small hotel. She heavily promoted it on Facebook, knowing this event would measure the demand of Gluten Free Connecticut in the community. The expo blew Kelly out of the water—expecting 400–500 people to show up, but drawing over 1,500. “It signaled to me that this business could potentially flourish,” said Kelly, adding, “[After that] it just took off. In 2018, I expanded into Gluten-Free New England.

She credits her progress to her husband’s support. “I’m very lucky to have an entrepreneur husband who is also a marketing expert. With his oversight, I took it really slowly—completing each step carefully to fully understand the process. He is still my consultant and advisor.” Nonetheless, with family, friends, and community support she still has had bumps in the road—her biggest challenge being “running my business ethically in a dog-eat-dog world,” Kelly says. Her biggest competitor, a national gluten-free directory, was stealing restaurant listings from her website. Her and Gluten Free New England employees were spending hours researching and adding in gluten-friendly restaurants to the directory, just for others to take them for their own. First trying to come to terms with the competitor’s CEO, Kelly ended up hiring an attorney. Still, Kelly says “I hate that it had to come to [legal prosecution]. So I try to be the change.”

And, of course, the biggest challenge yet: COVID-19. Kelly planned for 2020 to be her biggest year, with three in person expos scheduled across the region. Her business was flourishing and growing at a fast pace, when like most other businesses, abruptly stopped when the outbreak hit. As a small business, she knew the pandemic would hit hard financially and she had to get creative. She organized Expo To-Go, samples from gluten free brands and businesses that she shipped across the country, that were majorly successful. “The show must go on!” Kelly says, “I have a feeling that in-person events will have to wait until 2022, but that’s ok, because I love thinking of new ways to continue connecting the gluten-free community with new products and services!”



Owner Abby Helman Kelly on 'Better Connecticut,' Picture courtesy of wfsb.com

A Simsbury Staple

by Emma Kolb

If you are a native of Simsbury, Connecticut, it is almost undoubted that you have visited the peach and lime green themed building, filled with tens of families, located in the Drake Hills mall. Peachwave of Simsbury is a staple in the Simsbury community, being the go-to frozen yogurt store for many ages ranging from elementary school kids up to full-grown adults. The store provides many yogurt flavors for mixing and matching and an endless possibility of toppings to go along with them. The family-friendly environment is inviting to all who enter, creating an enticing destination for frozen treats.



Monica Conde is the proud owner of this store in the Peachwave franchise. With an accounting background, she was well suited to pursue her dream of starting a business. Conde has always felt a passion for business and applying herself in the workforce, having worked her first job at age twelve. Although she had no prior experience in the food industry, Conde knew she could handle the management and clerical parts of owning a franchise when she saw Peachwave was up for sale. Conde quotes that she is proud of “doing something I have never done before and learning to encourage me, that I can do it, learning to take a risk, and always being grateful that I had the opportunity.”

Despite Peachwave’s long-time popularity in the community and the owner’s considerable work, like all other businesses, success has dwindled because of the Pandemic. Moreover, any frozen treat business is seasonal; more tend to buy frozen goods during the summer than in the winter, which has intensified the sales deficit in recent months. Long time employee Anna Shellman says she “worked an entire five-hour shift without seeing any customers.” She added, “it’s really sad seeing the effect the Pandemic has had on business. I used to serve crowds of people all the time, and now it’s rare to serve even one.”

Efforts to increase sales, such as bringing back ‘No Weigh Thursday’ and gift card deals, have brought back minimal results. Conde initially reduced store hours, leaving the store closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. Even these changes weren’t enough to keep the business afloat—Peachwave, the beloved childhood frozen yogurt store, has been shut down for the next weeks. Nevertheless, the new COVID vaccine gives a new sense of hope for the store and perhaps even normalcy. It seems impossible to believe that such a loved store in our community could lose its footing. But with the support of its broad base of customers, the Peachwave of Simsbury may survive this tough winter.



Keys to Success

by Riley Tennant

Tim Jorel, the owner of TJ's restaurant in Newington, Connecticut, has over 20 years of experience managing and owning restaurants. After briefly speaking with him, I was able to get a sense of the story behind his success. Tim shared several recommendations on how to grow and maintain a successful business. He also stated his primary secret to success: talented team members. Above all else, his employees must know they are valued and create an exceptional dining experience for all of

their customers. Tim also emphasized how his hard work and commitment are critical components of his restaurant's success. "Starting a business from the ground up takes a tremendous amount of time and effort," says Tim, "if someone is not 100% committed to the success of their business, it will not survive." Based on Tim's experience, new business owners must be prepared to put in long hours, often over consecutive days. Planning and preparing for long days can help keep your business, and yourself, running smoothly. Additionally, setting goals can help keep business teams on track while also providing wins to celebrate along the way and motivation to continue.

Although Tim said it's important to know what to do to succeed, he says it's equally important to know what to avoid. According to Tim, a negative mindset is the number one thing to avoid. "Building a business from an idea is an enormous project," says Tim, "coming into it thinking it will be a breeze could lead to failure and disappointment." Planning, being prepared, and celebrating milestones will help keep you focused and in a positive frame of mind.

Tim is currently focused on maintaining and expanding his successful business. Over the years, Tim has learned that keeping customers happy requires understanding what your customers like and being able to pivot as their tastes change. For Tim, that means regular menu testing so he can learn about his customer's preferences. He can adjust his menu, using the information gathered from testing, which improves customer experience and results in customers returning. Tim emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive environment and friendly staff to ensure customers enjoy their experience, as repeat customers are crucial for small businesses.

When asked about employees and what characteristics are most important, Tim said he looked for genuine, trustworthy, and responsible team members. Trustworthy employees give business owners the confidence to delegate and increase staff responsibility. On the other hand, untrustworthy and irresponsible staff members can put customers and profit at risk. Hiring genuine, professional, and kind employees are equally important. These skill sets, coupled with employees who care about the well being of the customers and their team members, is a recipe for success. Additionally, providing a safe, comfortable, and positive environment is key to keeping good employees happy and working for you.

Thank you to all the businesses and their owners for their kindness & cooperation!

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About Us

We are a group of SHS students involved in the National Business Honor Society and Future Business Leaders of America organizations. Over the past month, students have interviewed or researched various entrepreneurs and written articles, which we compiled to create our newsletter. Through this project, students gain real business knowledge and familiarize themselves with local businesses and their practices while simultaneously shining a spotlight on those businesses.

We hope that this newsletter helps highlight businesses and serves as a form of promotion; after all, recent months have made goings incredibly difficult for most businesses. We want this newsletter to help reinvigorate our small business community—it is more important than ever to shop small & local.

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