

A Stuffed Fox & Entrepreneurship

By Grace Underwood



It all started with a stuffed fox and thread. As a child I was constantly creating clothes. I loved seeing different fabrics and designs. But I hated the designs that always used the “average size.” They never fit me properly because of my height, just like how all the doll clothes wouldn’t fit on my nephew’s stuffed fox. When he came to me and asked if I could sew some pants for his stuffed fox, I realized maybe average isn’t the answer, adaptability is, with both humans and stuffed foxes. Society is stuck with the idea that we are all average, but people are uniquely beautiful, and they deserve clothes that make them feel that way. They shouldn’t have to alter everything they buy. Thus, the essence of my business, Ethereal was born with adaptability as its main priority.

But I had to ask myself, what even goes into a business? That’s where things started to feel difficult, yet sometimes in life where we are and where we’re going do not seem to add up, but that doesn’t mean it’s the wrong way. Young entrepreneurs are incredibly gifted with a vision for the future, and they need a place that will foster that vision. That

is what I found at J.Q.Dickinson Saltworks, and Cottage Way Florals. Working as a part-time employee for both of these small companies, I got the opportunity to understand what it takes to start a business, and most importantly, that a business is nothing without its customers. People care about quality and sustainability and that’s how Ethereal gained its tagline, sustainable and timeless fashion. I learned how to start a fashion business from the basics I learned at a salt and a flower company.

Sometimes all you must do is go in, burn the escape boats, and decide to change the future. Which is what brought me to the University of Charleston. There I got to see something incredible. My business idea gained traction and it became more real and they had a competition for student entrepreneurs. It was the I3 Competition which stands for ideas, products, and invention. The competition began with the submission of a 5 minute video and additional materials. The finalists chosen then gave a live presentation. I tied for 2nd place in the product division. A fellow student’s product who tied me had a business plan for aqua

hydroponic gardens. Very cool! Through this entire process I understood that such endeavors are a vision God reveals to you and soon the right place and people will understand it. I am incredibly grateful for the entrepreneurial gift of vision and creating, as well as a place that fosters it such as UC.

So, my entrepreneurial journey continues with hopes of encouraging others and am now in Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) and serve as State President. As I learn more from this incredible organization and college, my business becomes more tangible everyday. It is hard for me to imagine that just one year ago I was a senior at Riverside High! While at Riverside I got a head start on my college degree by accumulating 12 credit hours online during my junior and senior high years that put me one year closer to my college degree. I can only imagine where I will be when I finish here at UC – and if you have any desire to have your own business someday, stay steadfast, learn the necessary skills, and believe in the good things that can happen for you.