

Students start businesses

Students become campus entrepreneurs

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Editor

Jael McElvain, Shelby Ragsdale and Mark Bolger have each found a way to turn a hobby into a profitable business. Between their campus work and class obligations, they earn extra money doing what they love.

For McElvain, a senior graphic arts and studio art major, that means taking pictures.

Snapping Photos

"Essentially most of what I do is portrait work," McElvain said. "But I have done a couple jobs for apartment complexes around town. I'm doing a shoot for Lily's Landing, or several in fact, over the next year. And that's more commercially based, but a lot of what I do is portraiture and weddings."

McElvain began getting into photography around age 17, and she became a lot more involved after starting college. She said her abilities and her confidence in her skills have improved with time.

"By the time I was a sophomore and I took photography and started shooting a lot more weddings," she said, "and I feel a lot more confident with what I'm able to do – confident enough that I'm probably going to pursue a career in photography, but I definitely need more training, so that'll either come in the form of grad school or internships."

Starting a photography business, McElvain needed camera equipment and editing software.

"Not cheap toys," McElvain said.

She said she was able to pay for them with scholarships, money she earned in high school and money she borrowed from her sister.

"Honestly, scholarships were the biggest deal," McElvain said. "Scholarships and just having faith that 'I'm going to do this and if I waste this money, it's just money, oh well.'"

Braiding fabric

Ragsdale, a junior elementary education major, earns extra cash selling hand-made fabric necklaces at Apricot Lane, a fashion boutique on the Branson Landing.

Ragsdale said she had a lot of vintage skeleton keys that she had bought at antique stores. She got creative and began making necklaces with leftover fabric.

"My friend Addie Johnson works at Apricot Lane on the Landing," Ragsdale said, "and she's a manager there and she thought that maybe they could sell them in their store."

Ragsdale has been making handmade items since she was in high school. Having them in a store is a big step for Ragsdale, who said she wants to own a boutique selling handmade items.

"When I actually got it in the store I was like 'Wow, this is a big step in this whole thing that I want to do,'" Ragsdale said.

Looking towards the future, Ragsdale said she has talked with Apricot Lane about selling bracelets. She also wants to begin selling items on Etsy, a website where users can buy and sell vintage and homemade items.

major, and his friend Brad Kuklenski have started a web development and web design business.

"[Kuklenski] is a business major so he always has ideas like this," Bolger said. "So he asked me if I would be willing to build sites for him if he got clients. So basically he just started finding clients and we started building sites for them."

Business for Bolger's and Kuklenski's company comes from a variety of places, but mostly customers find their company via word of mouth.

Bolger doesn't plan on staying with the business after he graduates.

Balancing act

Even though their businesses are doing well, McElvain, Ragsdale and Bolger have to remember that they are still students.

"I have to set in mind that homework comes first," McElvain said, "so if I need to say no I do. And then I just have to fit it in and not sleep."

Ragsdale said she sets aside one weekend a month to focus on her business.

Bolger's work is similar to his on-campus job in the Computer Center. He said it's almost as though he works 30 hours at the same job.

Bolger recommends other students find a way to make money with their hobbies. Although startup costs have to be considered, he said they are often not a problem for skill-based labor.

"So far it's been worthwhile for us," Bolger said. "So if there's something you enjoy that you can use there's no reason to not at least giving it a try."

