

The Cullman Times

Friends and Neighbors

Aiming for the best



Sonya Nix made the transition from health care to small-business owner.

PAMELA RAMEY / THE CULLMAN TIMES

Shop owner makes transition to live 'American dream'

By Pamela Ramey
THE CULLMAN TIMES

When life gives you lemons, you are supposed to make lemonade. Sonya Nix took her lemons, made lemonade, and then started her own business. Now her life is just like her award-winning shop: "Better than Before".

Nix was born and raised in Decatur. After graduating from UNA in the 1980's, she worked for years as a registered nurse until the company she worked for went out of business. That, said Nix, was the catalyst for her venture into retail.

"I decided I wanted to be my own boss. If I ended up without a job, I wanted that to be my decision, and not the fault of someone else," she said.

She prayed about the situation, and then got busy "living the American Dream", as she calls it. She teamed up with her mother, Dot Whaley, who was between jobs at the time, and they opened their first store. For the first two years, Nix worked both as a nurse and as a business owner. Finally, she "stepped out in faith" to full-time retail and never looked back. Now, twelve years later, Nix manages the Cullman store, and Whaley manages the one in Decatur.

"It's been harder than I imagined, but I wouldn't go back to nursing. I feel like I am where God wants me to be. I feel like I have helped just as many people, if not more, right here," said Nix.

Part of that help is providing "gently worn" designer clothing at a fraction of the original cost.

Nix said she receives several "thank you's" daily from people who shop at her stores to clothe their entire families. A recent first-time customer from California remarked that Nix's store was the nicest consignment shop she had ever visited, a compliment that Nix took to heart. The impact that she makes on the lives of others is what Nix enjoys most about her job.

"I like to know that what I do here matters to people, and that I have a positive impact on someone's life. I am not here just to make a living. I like to think I provide a community service, too," said Nix.

Nix's bargains are not the only things that people notice about her shop. They can't help but see her window displays, which often give first-time visitors the impression that her

store is a trendy boutique, not a consignment shop. Designing those displays is a passion to Nix.

"Many customers tell me they can't wait to see what we are going to display next. I lay in bed at night and think about the windows and the displays. I love creating them. I wish I had more time and space to devote to it," she said.

Outside of work, Nix is active in her church, Bethsaida Baptist, where she teaches Sunday School, and her husband, Glen, serves as music director. She also spends as much time as possible with her family: daughter Savannah, a teacher at Hanceville; son, Josh, an engineering student at UAH, and granddaughter Sadie. Nix also loves to sew, decorate, and work in her flower garden.

She said she has considered franchising, possibly into Madison, but after work, family, and church, "there's not enough of me to do it all. I have the best staff I have ever had, but to run a business effectively, you really need to be there," she said.

Nix's store has won "Cullman's Best Consignment Shop" for nine years in a row. In addition, she has been nominated for "Small Business Person of the Year" three times.

Nix said the secret to her success is simple: hard work, faith, and knowing who the boss really is.

"Worry about pleasing God, and not people, and everything else will fall into place. Good guys don't always finish last," she said.

"All it takes is a little bit of guts, and a lot of hard work."

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