



STOMP SBA INC.

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In the entrepreneurial world, building your business in a manner that compliments the existing community context is a key to success. STOMP! Shoes in downtown Sycamore is successful because it fulfills a gap of previously unaddressed desires for DeKalb county residents. Specifically, there was a lack of depth in customized service and specialty brands in the shoe retail business.

STOMP! began servicing customers in July of 2009, but was truly born decades earlier. Store owner Kathleen Styles began in chain retail as a manager at JCPenney and Co., where she learned the depth and specifics of the retail business after earning degrees in management and marketing at Southwest Missouri State University. Years later, Ms. Styles decided she wanted a business in the tight-knit community of Sycamore, but had no idea what to sell or where to locate.

Former Sycamore City Manager Bill Nicklas had a vision for downtown Sycamore: a restored status as a living, thriving, walkable community center with a vintage feel. As Kathleen Styles described her vision for a business, they together brainstormed a shoe and clothing retailer that was personalized in nature and carried the vision of a vibrant downtown Sycamore with it. The picture became a restored, quirky retail shoes business in downtown Sycamore with custom brands and personalized, expertise driven customer service.

STOMP! shoes was financed effectively because due diligence was used in the planning phase of the business. Kathleen spent 6 months writing and revising her business plan, doing market analysis and forecasting (using the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation's data), and securing capital. According to Kathleen Skyles, representatives at American National Bank of DeKalb County stated that it was one of the best business plans they had seen in their careers. STOMP! Shoes is thus the culmination of great vision and careful planning.

The most striking aspect of STOMP! is the level of personalized customer service and brand expertise offered by the management and associates. The specialty, and generally orthopedic-friendly shoes offered by STOMP! are carefully provided by knowledgeable staff that ask a variety of questions to fit footwear with lifestyle. According to Ms. Skyles, "we can't offer the middle-brand shoes at the pricing levels of big-box stores because of their purchasing power, but we can offer the highest grade customer service and shoes they can't find within a 100 mile radius." STOMP! shoes is an inspirational business that truly makes the customer feel at home, and was born of vision, planning, and a community-based focus. In fact, I was so impressed with the shopping experience that I did not leave the interview without purchasing a pair of shoes.

--Julian Magdaleno
DeKalb County Board Office