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SBA Helps Entrepreneur Put Meaning Into “A Camping We Will Go”

LEWIS COUNTY - Broken Wheel Campground is conveniently nestled in the forested hills of Lewis County, WV. At the campground, campers can experience nature in an area that has unsurpassed scenic beauty and many recreational opportunities, and is only moments away from beautiful Stonewall Jackson Lake and Stonecoal Lake.

Owner Greg Yokum opened the campground approximately 10 years ago out of necessity. He had owned and operated a small coal company during a time when larger coal companies were buying them out. He knew that he couldn't depend on the coal industry to make a living and would need to find something different.

With 840 acres of family property Yokum and his wife Donna, both outdoor enthusiasts, had a dream of opening a campground. With the development of the Stonewall Jackson State Park and talk of other developments in the area, they felt that a campground would be the ideal business. What began with five primitive (tent) camp sites and a small wooden sign along the side of Skin Creek Road has now grown to 36 full service camp sites and an additional 12 primitive sites for those who still like to rough it.

But it wasn't as easy as it sounds. Needing financing to get the project rolling, they approached several banks and were turned away each time. Not completely discouraged and still believing in their dream, the Yokums presented their idea to Bank One, who in turn suggested a U.S. Small Business Administration guaranty loan.

“Working through the paper-work, putting together a business plan, getting appraisals, and other required documentation, which took about three months to complete, was the toughest part,” said Yokum. “But in the end the SBA guaranteed loan was worth it.”

Equipped with a bulldozer, and with the help of friends and family, the Yokum's dream soon became a reality. But it isn't without hard work and sacrifice. “Everyday is an obstacle,” said Greg, “but we are determined to make it work.”

Asked where he gets his inspiration, he is quick to say, “Donna is my strength. She has supported me without complaining from day one. It is an equal partnership.”

The camp sites are spacious and include electric & water to accommodate anywhere from the largest Recreational Vehicle to the smallest tent. They also operate a country store on site where the campers can find groceries, cold drinks, firewood, fishing and hunting supplies, as well as the unusual and unique gifts like Indian items, West Virginia crafts, handmade jewelry and more.

They have on site a catch and release pond that is well stocked with various West Virginia game fish. “We've found that the fish pond is a popular spot among the young campers,” said Yokum. “Being a catch and release pond, there is no state fishing license required. Numerous youngsters have caught their first fish here.”

The Yokums donate the use of their facilities to the West Virginia Sportsman Association and the West Virginia Wild Turkey Federation for various events. They sponsor three Tom Thumb Fishing Tournament's a year for children under the age of 12. "This is a fun morning, not only for the kids, but the adults as well," said Yokum. "First place receives a weekend camping pass for four, and the 2nd, 3rd, and "lunker" places receive a trophy and an additional prize."

They also hold special event weekends throughout the year that include parades, karaoke, local bands, American Woods Championship racing series, hay rides, and even a Cowboy Christmas in July, as well as other events. These events are not only for the campers, but the general public as well.

The campground stays busy through hunting season, but January, February and March are generally slow months. "I try to make up for the winter off months during the summer by offering a variety of events," said Yokum.

The campground has had visitors from numerous countries, such as, Japan, Israel, Germany, Canada, Australia and Finland. Many of these are just tourists traveling through West Virginia and noticed the campground sign along Interstate 79. Most customers are planned visits, while the rest comes from word of mouth and of course, there are those who visit every weekend just to "get away from it all."

Yokum attributes the success of his business to SBA. "If it hadn't been for the SBA, who knows where I would be today," he states. "In fact, we're expanding and talking to the bank about another SBA loan."

For additional information about the programs and services offered by the SBA and their resource partners, contact the West Virginia District Office at 1-800-767-8052 ext. 8 or by email at wvinfo@sba.gov, or visit our web site at www.sba.gov/wv.

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