

Joe Short

Joseph Short is a glowing example of how drive and determination can turn into small business success. When Joe was in the 10th grade, at the age of 15, he got a part-time job working nine hours a week as a stock boy at his neighborhood IGA grocery store. He found he really enjoyed his job and the grocery business and took every opportunity he could to learn the store's operations, shadowing his bosses and especially the store's owner, Tom Conti, as he went around running the day to day operations of the store. Eventually he moved up to unloading trucks and monitoring merchandise flowing into the store. And when the store's manager left his position and the owner needed to fill the vacancy, Joe approached Mr. Conti and asked for the opportunity to give it a try. Mr. Conti gave him that chance...Joe was just 19 years old.

Every six months, Joe would check in with Mr. Conti to see how things were going. He continued to shadow the store's owner to learn every aspect of the business. And Mr. Conti mentored him every step of the way. He suggested that Joe start saving his pennies so he could purchase the store from him when he retired.

Then, unexpectedly, Mr. Conti passed away. His wife, Janet Conti, was left the business and she relied more and more on Joe to keep operations running smoothly. Then one day she took him to lunch and told him she wanted to get out of the business and sell the store. She gave Joe the first opportunity to purchase it.

That's when Joe met with Allen Weaver of the Lake County Small Business Development Center. Business bankers Dave Merkel and Ben Palazzo of Chase Bank, with whom Joe was working to help him find the financing to purchase the business, recommended Allen as the perfect person to advise him. Mr. Short learned about the various financing options that were available to him from Mr. Weaver and decided to go with the SBA 504 loan as his best vehicle. It provided him with more working capital up front because it required less money down. From his discussions with Mr. Weaver, he learned how important that was, especially for a new business.

After determining the appropriate loan for his needs, Mr. Weaver helped him through every step of the loan application process. "He was always available to me whenever I had questions," said Short. "I could call him any time and he always provided me with good information. And if he wasn't in, he always returned my calls promptly."

Mr. Short has now been the proud owner of his own neighborhood IGA grocery store for five months. And he's already thinking about expanding, not only his product offering but his square footage as he contemplates purchasing some available store frontage at his location. Because of his purchase, he has continued to be able to offer a neighborhood grocery store for the residents in his community.

When asked what advice he has for others who dream of opening their own business, Mr. Short replies, "I believe you are in charge of your own destiny. If you have the physical ability, mental capability and the motivation, you should try to fulfill your dreams." He also recommends giving yourself the opportunity to learn something to help your business every day and every chance

you get. "Being a small business owner is an opportunity for continuous learning," said Mr. Short. "I always learn something new every day."