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OUACHITA
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



NEWS



Alumni Stories: Jim, Darrell and Rob Potts
During a year of uncertainty, Ouachita alumni work to ensure their business stays on top

By Donna Hall

April 30, 2021

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – *Find a way.* It's a Potts family motto. And one they certainly needed for keeping retail stores open in a worldwide pandemic.

"Business is hard. Life is hard. You must learn to persevere," advises Rob Potts, Ouachita graduate and one of the owners of Lewis & Clark Outfitters, outdoor adventure stores in Northwest Arkansas.

Attending Ouachita is a family tradition. Darrell and Rob's dad, Jim, finished in 1971, Darrell in '90, and Rob in '91. Jim came to Ouachita on the advice of his boss. He arrived without a cent to his name but convinced then-President Ralph Phelps to take a chance on him; it was a life-changing experience. If you ever run into Jim at Lewis & Clark, get him to tell you the whole story!

Speaking about his choice to attend Ouachita, Rob said, "I'm an introvert and shy away from big crowds. My brother and a couple other guys attending OBU invited me to Tiger Traks. I visited and was hooked."

Darrell and his dad started Lewis & Clark Outfitters in 2000, along with Darrell's wife, Teena, who also attended Ouachita. Rob joined them soon after. They started with a passion for getting families to spend time together with one another in the outdoors.

"For us, we believe outdoor adventures such as cycling, camping, hiking and kayaking are the perfect time to build better relationships and memories that last a lifetime. We believe outdoor play/adventure is beneficial for a person not just physically, but mentally and spiritually, as well," Rob said.



The COVID-19 pandemic brought an immediate halt to the retail business in Arkansas in 2020.

Travel virtually was shut down as were many parks, hiking and backpacking trails, ski slopes and other destinations where people go and play.

The ability to adapt was essential for survival. First, they sold T-shirts, with 100% of the proceeds going to pay employees. Then bicycles took off as many people realized their spring and summer vacation plans were just not going to happen as planned. Bicycle riding was one of the few outdoor activities readily available.

Lewis & Clark experienced record demand and sales; a new website was designed for reaching those not able to come into the stores, and bicycle curbside-pickup was added. Then the bicycle industry, hit with production issues due to the pandemic and record demand, simply ran out of bikes. They continued to adapt and purchased e-bikes (pedal assist) from suppliers. For the last six months of the year, Lewis & Clark was week-to-week, figuring out what was available and then promoting it in their stores.

Looking back on the year, Rob commented, "Through it all, our Outfitters and customers have responded to the constant changes. That's been the one constant of the past year – constant change. In 2020, we had our best bike year ever, in spite of inventory being an ongoing struggle.

"We have found that this pandemic has forced many of us to rethink and realign our priorities of what is important in life," he continued. "Naturally, the great outdoors is a safe place to be and the perfect place to really connect with others."

The vision the Potts brothers have for their business is "to enhance lives through outdoor adventure." Even in a pandemic, they have continued to find a way to make this happen.

Find out more about Lewis & Clark at www.gooutandplay.com.