Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

energizing entrepreneurial communities

Our story of Lynn Driver is the third in a series of entrepreneur stories from Pottawattamie County Iowa and the HomeTown Competitiveness Initiative.



Lynn Driver

Ultimate Lifestyle Entrepreneur

09.18.13

About Lynn

The story goes that if you live life fully for long enough, you will create a pretty interesting resume. This is very true for Lynn Driver and his most recent entrepreneurial venture, Emma Jean's Restaurant located in Walnut, Iowa. People like Lynn seem to hate being classified, but in our book, Lynn could be called a serial lifestyle entrepreneur. He has created multiple businesses in his lifetime making him a serial entrepreneur, and in talking with Lynn, you will quickly discover that his life and work are very interconnected making him a lifestyle entrepreneur. He does not necessarily want to change the world with his businesses; he wants to do something interesting and rewarding while making a living at it.

Emma Jean's Restaurant and More../

I-80 & Antique City Drive
Walnut, Iowa

Lynn's Chronology

Control Data Employee (*about 8 years*)
Owned a Construction Business
Real Estate Sales (*about 10 years*)
Radio and TV Sales and Marketing
(*Traveled a lot nationally)*
Private Detective
Vice President for Marketing
Now Emma Jean's

Lynn has been an entrepreneur and also worked for others. This experience gives him wisdom and insight on the tradeoffs between being your own boss and working for someone else. While he has had great jobs, he has always gravitated back to being an entrepreneur. Lynn has done many things ranging from working for the Control Data Corporation to his current work with Emma Jean's. The inset on the left provides a quick chronology of his history as an employee and an entrepreneur.

When initially asked what advice he would give to others thinking of becoming entrepreneurs, Lynn shared that he wished he could have gone further in his education and gotten a better job. But when pushed, Lynn confessed that he likes being his own boss and creating something. Like many serial entrepreneurs, Lynn admitted to having less passion for running a business than creating one. Serial entrepreneurs are really important in places like Pottawattamie County Iowa. Serial entrepreneurs first and foremost are fairly savvy and experienced. They know the business game and typically have strong networks that help them put together a

business deal. Serial entrepreneurs are also opportunity-focused. They are constantly looking out for deals, unmet needs or business opportunities. When a community has a cluster of serial entrepreneurs they give new energy and life to the region's business community. However, as Lynn has already noted, serial entrepreneurs often do not have a passion for running their creations for the long-term. The reality about serial entrepreneurs like Lynn is that they create opportunities for *others* to become business managers or buyers of the serial entrepreneur's creations.

Lynn's True Passion

You probably noted that in Lynn's resume he was a private detective for a while. Clearly, I was interested and he shared that his true life's ambition was to go into law enforcement. He had an Uncle in the Marshall Service and he aspired to go down this road. But his education and age never matched up. However, he did create a national business that undertook collateral collection. Entrepreneurs typically follow their passions and their businesses often enable them to follow dreams.

Why Start a Business?

Lynn Driver had never before in his life owned and operated a restaurant. He really had no experience in this type of business other than as a patron of cafés, diners and restaurants. So, why did Lynn go down this road when the restaurant business has a reputation for taking down passionate entrepreneurs?

As is often the case for those starting an entrepreneurial venture, Lynn's journey began by necessity. Life and work were going on very well in his position as Vice President for Marketing for an area company until Lynn's employer died unexpectedly. Despite the owner suggesting Lynn as the likely candidate for keeping the company going, others in the family had different views and plans. Lynn left his job behind and began looking for something new. In October 2011, Lynn attended an auction of a 7,500 square foot building with parking lot located on Exit 46 of Interstate Highway 80 and Antique City Drive leading into Walnut. By the end of the auction, Lynn was the new property owner and was on his way to creating Emma Jean's.

Advice for Young Entrepreneurs

Lynn and older entrepreneurs have been around the game for quite some time. Their breadth and depth of experience really help with a new startup, but what does this mean for a younger and less experienced startup? Entrepreneurship is a team sport. For younger and less experienced entrepreneurs, it is important to reach out for help and creatively build a team that gives you passion and capability in marketing, finance and production. We have a webinar link on this topic you may want to view:

Jack Newcomb Webinar Link

As Lynn reflected on this latest entrepreneurial venture, he realized that many of his previous experiences are proving to be very helpful. There are advantages to having such diverse life experiences to draw on in starting a new business. The building he bought had to be totally gutted and rebuilt, so Lynn's experience in construction came into play. His decade-long work with real estate helped him in acquisition and in putting the entire real estate deal together. Other ventures equipped him to hire, train and manage his staff. Experience, connections and understanding the game help and really make a difference in entrepreneurial startups like Emma Jean's.



About Emma Jean's

Emma Jean's is more than a simple interstate restaurant with tables and booths. It is actually three inter-related businesses:

Café – Dining Room with Buffet – Conference Center

Lynn had the space and has employed it smartly to meet three different customer needs. All three ventures are supported by the same kitchen, parking lot, staff and business systems. Creating allied profit centers enhances the chances of business success. Right now, Emma Jean's provides a competitive alternative to McDonalds and other traditional chain fast food. The July 2012 customer posting on Trip Advisor sums up the market position for this restaurant. High on Lynn's list of to-dos is signage on the Interstate. Capitalizing on this high volume traffic intersection is important, and of course anyone who has recently travelled between Des Moines and Council Bluffs on I-80 knows well that there are limited restaurant offerings apart from chain restaurant fast food.

> **"Basic fare, but good food"**
>
> Reviewed July 1, 2012
>
> I recently had an opportunity to eat at this restaurant. It is a place for basic Village Inn type fare with some surprises. I had the Sloppy Joe's and Fries. Tasted like a man-wich, but it was all very good food and worth the price (about $10)... If you are staying at the Super 8 next door, go ahead and try the food there. Much better than the McDonalds next door and the people are super friendly!! I would eat here again if I was looking for a quick bite.

John Adams – Business Coach

One question we always ask entrepreneurs is, "Who helped you in becoming successful as an entrepreneur?" When I asked this question of Lynn, there was a long pause and he first responded, "No one but me!" Lynn is a do it yourself kind of person. He has figured out for himself how to get things done. Of course, support from family and friends is important. But there really are not any mentors or special resources that have made a difference in Lynn's entrepreneurial hike. Lynn even indicated that he has never borrowed money. This story line held true until Lynn met John Adams, the Business Coach working with entrepreneurs in rural Pottawattamie County. Lynn trusts John and looks forward to their visits. Like Lynn, John is a veteran in this business. John can challenge Lynn and help him focus and gain perspective. He understands and has empathy for what Lynn is experiencing, but John also uses candor and tough love with Lynn. Lynn has come to respect that and is finding value in their work together. Lynn's advice to other entrepreneurs: "Find someone like John!"



John Adams, Pottawattamie County Business Coach

When asked who has helped him with his entrepreneurial ventures, Lynn is quick to acknowledge the support of his wife, Cheri!

John Adams position and work is supported through a partnership of Western Iowa Development Association or WIDA (www.wida.org), Iowa Western Community College (www.iwcc.edu) and the national Center for Rural Entrepreneurship through Pottawattamie County HomeTown Competitiveness (htccommunity.org) and with funding from the Iowa West Foundation (www.iowawestfoundation.org). WIDA provides comprehensive economic development support in Pottawattamie County including an on-line Tools for Business Success resource. Iowa Western Community College hosts John and provides business assistance services through the Small Business Development Center, SCORE and other programs.

We want to thank Lynn Driver and John Adams for their willingness to share their stories with us. We hope this story celebrates another America entrepreneur, Lynn Driver and his new Emma Jean's Restaurant, and inspires other entrepreneurs to grow local economies by growing their business dreams.

This story was developed by Don Macke with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (www.energizingentrepreneurs.org). The Center is part of a project called Pottawattamie County HomeTown Competitiveness or HTC supported by the Iowa West Foundation and the Pottawattamie County Supervisors. The Rural Pottawattamie County Business Success Program is supported by WIDA (www.wida.org) and the Iowa Western Community College and Small Business Development Center (www.iwccecenter.com).

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Questions & More Information

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The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship's mission is to help community leaders build a prosperous future by supporting and empowering business, social and civic entrepreneurs. With our roots and hearts in rural America, we help communities of all sizes and interests by bringing empowering research, community engagement and strategy development to you through our many Solution Areas. Our **Solution Area Teams** empower communities to discover their own answers to the challenges and opportunities they face:

- **Community Development Philanthropy:** Providing research and community engagement strategies that help communities build philanthropic capacity and create development resources now and in the future.
- **Youth Engagement:** Providing tools and a framework for communities to engage young people now and to bring them home in the future.
- **Measurement Research Policy:** Providing the tools to help communities define development goals, measure success and improve outcomes.
- **Entrepreneurial Communities:** Providing a roadmap for communities to design and deliver entrepreneur-focused economic development strategies that work.

To learn more about us, go to www.energizingentrepreneurs.org.

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