



Alonda McCarty and Chelsea Preston

New Smyrna Beach, Florida



The Florida Local

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Alonda McCarty and Chelsea Preston:

When New Smyrna Beach native Alonda McCarty met Kentucky transplant and owner of Jelly Press, Chelsea Preston, the two hit it off immediately. As their friendship blossomed, so did the idea of starting an artisan market that showcases Florida artists and local brands. After a "crazy brewery night" where McCarty and Preston worked up the courage to take action on their idea, they put the wheels in motion and went looking for the perfect location.

"We first started talking about the idea two years ago," Preston said. "Not long after, we put together a business plan and started looking for the right location. Along the way, we got a lot of local support. Tony Otte, with the City of New Smyrna Beach, connected us with Maggie Incandela at Daytona State's Small Business Development Center to help with the business plan. After securing a building, that eventually fell

through, we found another small building on Julia Street owned by an old family friend of my husband, Kevin Schweizer. He is actually an architect in town who loves to support local businesses."

After they secured a location, McCarty and Preston completed renovations and made connections with artisans and other entrepreneurs from around the state. Through a combination of visiting local artisan markets, exploring Etsy and Instagram and through word-of-mouth connections, they discovered and assembled a mix of goods that showcase everything they love about the Sunshine State.

"We think more people are gravitating back towards local boutiques," Preston said. "They want unique and authentic experiences. They also want things you can't find off the shelves of a Target. Everything in our shop is highly curated and 100% local from the state of Florida."

McCarty added, "We also wanted to offer services as a way to develop into more of a lifestyle brand and as an additional income opportunity. That's part of how you survive as a brick and mortar. We'll start doing night markets to allow vendors to showcase products that might not fit into our store yet, high-end date nights, workshops featuring different vendors, coffee tastings and more."

The coffee served at The Florida Local is provided by Trilogy Coffee, a local roaster out of DeLand. Owners Clay and Michelle Cass, actually helped design and set up the coffee bar inside The Florida Local. According to McCarty and Preston, Trilogy was an easy choice to partner with.

"We were constantly going to Trilogy Coffee while visiting DeLand,"

Preston shared. "They always have the most consistent cup of coffee and we wanted to bring some of that DeLand "coolness" that's happening right now to New Smyrna Beach. It's honestly been a great marriage. As we continue to grow, we'll certainly incorporate them into our growth strategy."

With the grand opening on June 21st, 2019, The Florida Local has been open for less than one month. We asked McCarty and Preston about some of the challenges, both expected and unexpected, they've faced since opening their doors.

"It's just the two of us right now," McCarty said. "We're here all day from 5:30am until 7:00pm. We knew that would be the case, but it's been exhausting going through the process. It's also been a challenge to find people you can trust with something that's so special to you." Preston added, "While not a challenge, we didn't expect the amount of support we'd receive from the community. So many people in New Smyrna Beach are all about small businesses and keeping the charm. We really haven't done a whole lot of marketing, but people keep coming in after hearing about us from someone else."

Looking ahead, McCarty and Preston are working on a vendor application through their website to streamline the process of approving new artisans. They also have a five-year plan to open additional locations throughout the state. Each shop would be a little different, based on its location, and would feature products from regional artists and vendors.

McCarty offers some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "After going through the process with the city, utility company and contractors,

my advice is to not be afraid to ask questions," she said. "We saved a lot of money by asking questions and taking the time to understand our small business rights."

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