

# Glen Coffield

Sanford, Florida



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## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Glen Coffield:*

Born and raised in New York, Glen Coffield, Owner of Smart Guys Computers and a self-described electronics “geek”, moved to Orlando in 1986 to escape the harsh winters of the Northeast. After working for various electronic retailers, including Sears and Sound Advice, he started selling and fixing computers on the side. By 1995, his side hustle had grown well beyond the confines of his garage. Coffield shared the story behind his entrepreneurial journey, explained the importance of manageable growth and offered some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs.

“When I started my first store in Pine Hills, I had recently taken a leave of absence from Sears,” Coffield said. “I made good money with Sears, but when my wife got pregnant, I looked at things a bit differently. My mom

was also diagnosed with breast cancer, so I had a lot going on. At some point, Sears called and asked if I was coming back or not. That's when I decided to take a leap of faith."

Coffield shared that from day one they were slammed. It was the mid to late 90s and everyone wanted a computer. Further, most people relied on experts like Coffield to get connected to the Internet and to understand how to set up their systems. He eventually moved into a bigger building in Pine Hills and then added a second location in Longwood. From there, the business really took off.

"We opened a location in Orange City, then Tampa and Pinellas Park," Coffield said. "We moved the Pine Hills store to Winter Garden and, before we knew it, we had six stores. At the time, we were still doing business as Cheap Guys Computers."

Coffield moved to Lake Mary in 1999 – in part for the great public schools in Seminole County – and opened an additional store in Lake Mary. At this point, the business employed a total of 65 employees and encompassed seven stores. To say the business was booming is an understatement. Unfortunately, the rapid growth and the need to have to manage a young workforce spread out over several counties eventually took its toll on Coffield's health.

"Fourteen hospitalizations and seven major surgeries later, I decided that I had enough of managing multiple stores and employees," he said.

"I was stressed to the max which resulted in several physical health issues. With multiple locations, you need more controls in order to maintain a certain amount of order. However, no matter how many policies and procedures we put in place, there was always an issue. I'd

wake up expecting three fires per day.”

Coffield continued, “In 2016, we bought a building in Sanford and consolidated into one single store. My health improved and I was now in a better position – because I had more time – to get to know my customers and to interact with them.”

Over the years, Coffield has built his business by getting involved in the community and developing a reputation as a reliable IT professional. He’s been on local radio shows, TV commercials and has developed key relationships with Best Buy, Office Depot and other professionals and referral partners on the software side of IT.

“A lot of the IT guys in town buy from me because if they have a problem, they know I can fix it,” Coffield said. “Aside from repairs, we also sell Voice Over IP systems and custom designed machines for gamers.”

When asked about what he enjoys most about the computer business, Coffield was quick to point out the fact that he’s in a great position to help people. “A lot of things in technology are sometimes perceived as bad,” he said. “However, technology also helps to make people’s lives easier and improves employee efficiency. Helping people and building relationships is the best part of my job. We’re a true neighborhood computer store.”

Coffield added, “It’s also great to see our younger customers get excited about a new computer. We recently built a custom gaming system for a thirteen year old girl. When her dad brought her in to pick it up, her face lit up and all you could see was her braces behind a huge smile. That

was one of the best things that happened all year.”

Looking ahead, Coffield’s long-term goal is retirement. He’s not sure what that means for Smart Guys Computers, but he’d prefer that the business live on to ensure his clients are well taken care of and that the legacy lives on.

What advice does Coffield have for aspiring entrepreneurs? “Financially speaking, it’s important to plan for things that you’re going to have to replace,” he said. “Understand the lifespan of your equipment and have a plan to replace it. Put money away to build those reserves. Also, don’t believe your own press and don’t think you’re infallible. When everyone starts telling you how great you are, it might be time for some self-reflection. Finally, measure yourself against your own standards, not someone else’s and remember that you can’t make everyone happy.”

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