

# AERN aern.cba.ua.edu News

Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network, "Connecting Entrepreneurs to Resources"

## Dreamers Opens in Washington County

"Dream to accomplish great things, just dream." That's the motivation behind Dianne Waites's desire over the years to own her own business and now it has come true, literally.

Waites is the proud owner of Dreamers, a gift shop located at 17115 Jordan Street in Chatom, Alabama. And it was attendance at an AERN workshop that introduced her to many of the resources she needed to launch and sustain her new business. The event was sponsored by the Washington County Chamber of Commerce, and the Washington County Public Library, which hosts the AERN resources.

"We had ten to twelve businesses show up to this event, which is huge considering the size of Washington County," said Brooke Atchison, chamber executive director.

For her part, Waites was surprised at the quantity and quality of the resources available at the AERN center. Not only was she able to speak to other small business owners about shared problems, but she was also able to use the software to determine changes that needed to be made within her business.

"Ever since the workshop, I have been better able to take advantage of



Dreamers, a new Chatom, Alabama gift shop owned by Dianne Waites.

information about Washington County in terms of age groups and income. I have been able to see how much inventory we should and should not order. I really enjoyed the event," she said.

Waites has always been passionate about creating and designing. With her passion and her enjoyment of working with the public, opening her own business seemed right. Dreamers features such items as purses, jewelry, baby items, wall decorations, Blue Bell ice cream, soy candles, custom wreaths, hand paintings by Bridgette Moss, woodwork art, country quilts and baby blankets, T-shirts, and almost anything needed for a birthday or holiday gift.

"Even in hard times, people should have pretty things," Waites said. She uses Facebook to highlight this enthusiasm and some of the merchandise. On Facebook her potential customers will see dozens of photos and comments like this one from Kathie Dearman, "Expanding—a bigger store for you. Keep working, your dream has become a reality. So proud for you!"

Through the help of AERN, Waites hopes to keep her business alive despite the many struggles that come with any new business. Plans of taking out a loan for Dreamers seemed daunting at first, but after attending the AERN meeting, Waites was confident in knowing that she had business research support in her own community.

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She said it was great to have all the help she received from the chamber and at the library and that it was especially nice “knowing there were people there to help us with the idea of taking out the loan. Brooke [Atchison, chamber director] is so helpful and she has done a great job with advertising AERN resources at our library.”



Gifts one can find at Dreamers, a new business in Chatom, Alabama.

Now that she has been in business for awhile, Waites is no longer dreaming

about owning a business, only how to make it better.

Alicia Perez  
AERN Student Journalist

## Lee Pike: Key AERN Team Member at UA's Angelo Bruno Library

Lee Pike is like the point guard on a basketball team: He doesn't score many points; instead he sets up others by “dishing” them the ball, or in the case of AERN partners, the information they need to launch a business or keep it running with the efficiency of a well-coached team.

Pike is head of the Angelo Bruno Business Library, providing oversight for all operations in the library, serving as “coach” for the Bruno team, working with various commercial databases for business, and acting as liaison between UA's business school and the library administration.

Pike gets satisfaction from reaching out to communities who normally don't have access to the rich library resources of a major research university. For seven years, he worked as director of the Alabama Library Exchange (ALEX), which served over 40 libraries across eight counties in northern Alabama. ALEX facilitated the lending of materials to smaller libraries that generally don't have a wide range of materials. ALEX also facilitated the writing of grants for libraries to add to their capacity.

During his time as director of ALEX, Pike also served as a board member for the Library Management Network, a non-profit organization that shared technology to libraries within 10 counties in northern Alabama.

Other major players on Pike's business information team:

- Karen Chapman creates and maintains the AERN website and does the html magic that turns the AERN newsletter into a web marvel. She also monitors the “Ask a Business Librarian” feature of the website.
- Paul Brothers identifies print resources to be made available to the AERN partner sites and finds very specific answers to questions from the AERN partners.
- Mark Siciliano travels to partner sites to assist in the all-important training that helps constituents make the maximum use of library resources, materials and programs. He also does data extracts from complicated data bases for our partner agencies.



Top left to bottom right: Lee Pike, Karen Chapman, Paul Brothers, and Mark Siciliano.



“Ask a Business Librarian” link on the AERN website, located just below the menu on the left side. The AERN website can be found at <http://aern.cba.ua.edu>.

All four Bruno librarians answer questions asked through AERN's “Ask a Business Librarian” feature, which allows constituents and the public to ask any question they have to the Bruno library team. The questions

generally get a response within two business days.

“We pay attention to what we’re able to do through the AERN grants that support the project. We discuss new ideas and activities with Annette Watters and Paavo Hanninen, AERN’s co-directors,” Pike said. “We come up with an action plan and then the library provides those services.”



Bruno Business Library, The University of Alabama.

Annette Watters said, “Lee Pike’s involvement in AERN is so valuable. Because of his leadership, AERN partners have access to business information that they never, ever would be able to afford otherwise. He and the other faculty business librarians at UA have a real heart for practicing entrepreneurs. They bring a rich resource to the goal of increasing prosperity in rural Alabama.”

“We communicate with the AERN team all the time and monitor activities, whether through the website, the newsletters, partner visits, and other undertakings,” Pike said. “We consider AERN activities to be mainstreamed into what we do at Bruno. AERN is a business service that we enjoy providing to the community.”

Pike received his bachelor and master of library sciences degrees from the University of Alabama. After a brief stint working at the University of Colorado and as the director of the Evergreen Public Library in Colorado, Pike returned to his home state of Alabama.

“I recognized that libraries could serve communities in a nonconventional way and my experience in North Alabama gave me an appreciation that carried over to AERN’s mission.”

He also said his experience has taught him this lesson: “The community partners are the biggest assets of the AERN initiative.”

Daniel Hollander  
*AERN Graduate Student Journalist*

## Sumter County AERN Grand Opening Ceremony

The Sumter County Chamber of Commerce held its grand opening ceremony of the AERN Center on July 26, 2011 in Livingston. The AERN center is located inside the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce, at 502 Lafayette Street in Livingston. The Chamber’s executive director, Allison Tucker, provided a light lunch and emceed the ceremony. The event was well-attended by local officials and the business community.

Sumter County is looking forward to a busy holiday season, according to Ms. Tucker. The city and chamber of commerce will kick off the 2011 Christmas season with an antique car and boat show on the courthouse square. Many of the displays will be sponsored by local businesses. Also in December, Ms. Mary Patterson, AERN’s outreach coordinator, will conduct a workshop in Sumter County for potential and existing business persons who are interested in starting or growing their business ideas.



Ribbon cutting for the new AERN center at the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce in Livingston, Alabama, July 26, 2011.

“The chamber is attracting a growing number of business men and women to the office to use the resource materials

that AERN makes available to Sumter County residents,” Tucker said.

# Websites for Business Information

A great deal of information for entrepreneurs is freely available on the World Wide Web. But where to start looking? Go first to the AERN website!

At the home page < <http://aern.cba.ua.edu> >, click on the menu choice “Websites.” There you will find three categories of other choices—Small Business Websites, Helpful Collections, and Featured Websites. Look around in all of them.



In Featured Websites, we highlight a different link every month. Recent articles have been about

- **Shipping** - Need to ship products to your customers? Which company should you use? How much should you charge?
- **How to Find and Work With Suppliers** - Gives advice on identifying suppliers and making the most of your relationship
- **How to Raise and Lower Your Prices** - Eventually your prices must change. How much? What's the best timing?
- **When to Hire a Bookkeeper or Accountant** - When do you need to bring in an expert instead of doing it yourself? And which kind?
- **How to Budget Your Own Salary** - How much should you pay yourself? Tips and a handy worksheet
- **What's Your Signage?** - Subtitled “How Signs Can Help Your Small Business,” this site gives many tips to consider when planning and purchasing signs to represent your business

## Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network

### Project Directors

Annette Watters, Paavo Hanninen

### AERN Outreach Coordinator

Mary Patterson

### Other Team Members

Edward Mullins, Phillip White, Lee Pike,  
Paul Brothers, Karen Chapman,  
Sherry Lang, Mark Siciliano,  
Daniel Hollander, Alicia Perez

For more information: 205.348.6191

email: [awatters@cba.ua.edu](mailto:awatters@cba.ua.edu)

[phaninen@cba.ua.edu](mailto:phaninen@cba.ua.edu)

<http://aern.cba.ua.edu>

### THE AERN PARTNERS:

#### Bibb County

Tracey Mitchell, 205.926.5222, Centreville

#### Butler County

Francine Wasden, 334.382.3251, Greenville

#### Chambers County

Elinor Crowder, 334.642.1411, Lanett  
Mary Hamilton, 334.768.2161, Valley

#### Choctaw County

Virginia Loftis, 205.459.3459, Butler

#### Dallas County

Sheryl Smedley, 334.875.7241, Selma

#### Fayette County

Anne Hamner, 205.932.4587, Fayette

#### Greene County

Phillis Belcher, 205.372.9769, Eutaw

#### Macon County

Vicky Grice, 334.725.8496, Tuskegee

#### Marengo County

Jenn Tate, 334.289.0270, Demopolis

#### Marion County

Charla Lynn, 205.468.2082, Guin

#### Monroe County

Sandy Smith, 251.743.2879, Monroeville

#### Perry County

John Martin, 334.683.9622, Marion

#### Pickens County

Nelda Hudgins, 205.373.6691, Aliceville

#### Sumter County

Allison Tucker, 205.652.1580, Livingston

#### Tallapoosa County

Marvin Wagoner, 256.234.3461,  
Alexander City

#### Washington County

Jessica Ross, 251.847.2097, Chatom

#### Wilcox County

Ann Alford, 334.682.4234, Camden

*AERNews* is a quarterly publication of the Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network, The University of Alabama. Articles reflect the opinions of the authors, but not necessarily those of the staff of AERN, the faculty, or the administrative officials of The University of Alabama.

All correspondence should be addressed to: Editor, *AERNews*, Alabama Entrepreneurial Research Network, Center for Business and Economic Research, Box 870221, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0221.