Business Innovation Group (BIG) News

Georgia Southern University

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Alumni Focus-Brandon Blair

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A view of 180’s weight room from the entrance.

Google “180 Fitness” and you will find at least 10 different gyms in 10 different states with the namesake. But only one of them has trademarked the name and that same 180 Fitness is located in Statesboro, GA co-owned and operated by Georgia Southern graduate Brandon Blair.

Walking in the gym has a clean set up; there is no jarring clutter and confusion of which machine is where and where to start. Upstairs is the cardio deck and group fitness room and on the wall hangs oversized photos meant to inspire and push exercisers through a tough workout. There is no muss or fuss, overstated glitz and glamour, 180 Fitness is gym meant to make even beginners feel comfortable as they hit the weights or jog on the treadmills. Customer service has been their main focus since they first opened in January, 2006.

Before Brandon came to own 180 Fitness, he was a management and marketing student at Georgia Southern working his way through school as a personal trainer at Gold’s Gym. As a student, he was interested in small business and entrepreneurship but admits he was scared of rejection from corporations and how an entrepreneurship degree would look to potential job recruiters and managers.

“I was scared that if I wanted to get a job somewhere they would think, ‘Okay, he just wants to start his own business.’ But, what I’ve noticed now, the movement even within large firms is to promote that entrepreneurial spirit. If you promote that within your employees then they are going to do more for your company,” said Brandon.
While pursuing his management degree, he took several entrepreneurship classes and loved them. Before Brandon graduated, he wrote up a complete business plan for his father’s rental company which is still operating today. In 2001, after receiving his BBA and MBA Brandon worked for Fastenal in Savannah. While at Fastenal, he launched a landscaping business and BA Blair Developments, a land development company. Brandon’s landscaping business is still functioning and successful today but is no longer operated by Brandon. After leaving Fastenal, Brandon had to sell off the land from his development company and returned back to work in Statesboro.

In 2005, Brandon’s now partner, Angie Hitchens approached him with a proposition to take over the Gold’s Gym. Angie had worked with Brandon as his manager at Gold’s while he was in working through college. When Georgia Southern opened the Recreation and Activity Center (RAC) on campus Gold’s Gym lost $360,000 in the first year. And corporate offered Angie the opportunity to purchase the business.

After five years in business, Angie and Brandon have learned how to operate the gym, which market segment to concentrate on and how to cooperate as successful partners.

“Angie’s the one who tells me I’m crazy and reels me back in. I come up with all of these wild ideas and she’s the one that tells me ‘No way, that’s not going to work,’ or goes and figures out the numbers,” said Brandon.

Including the RAC, there are 5 gyms just around the campus area. 180 keeps its focus on families offering clean facilities, group fit classes and child care. They don’t offer 24 hour services because their main goal is to create a comfortable, inviting atmosphere with an emphasis on customer service and the facilities in town that offer 24/7 operations don’t keep a full staff. Brandon and Angie are now working on empowering the gym’s name by enforcing their trademark and are currently working to open a franchise in the Savannah/Hilton Head area.