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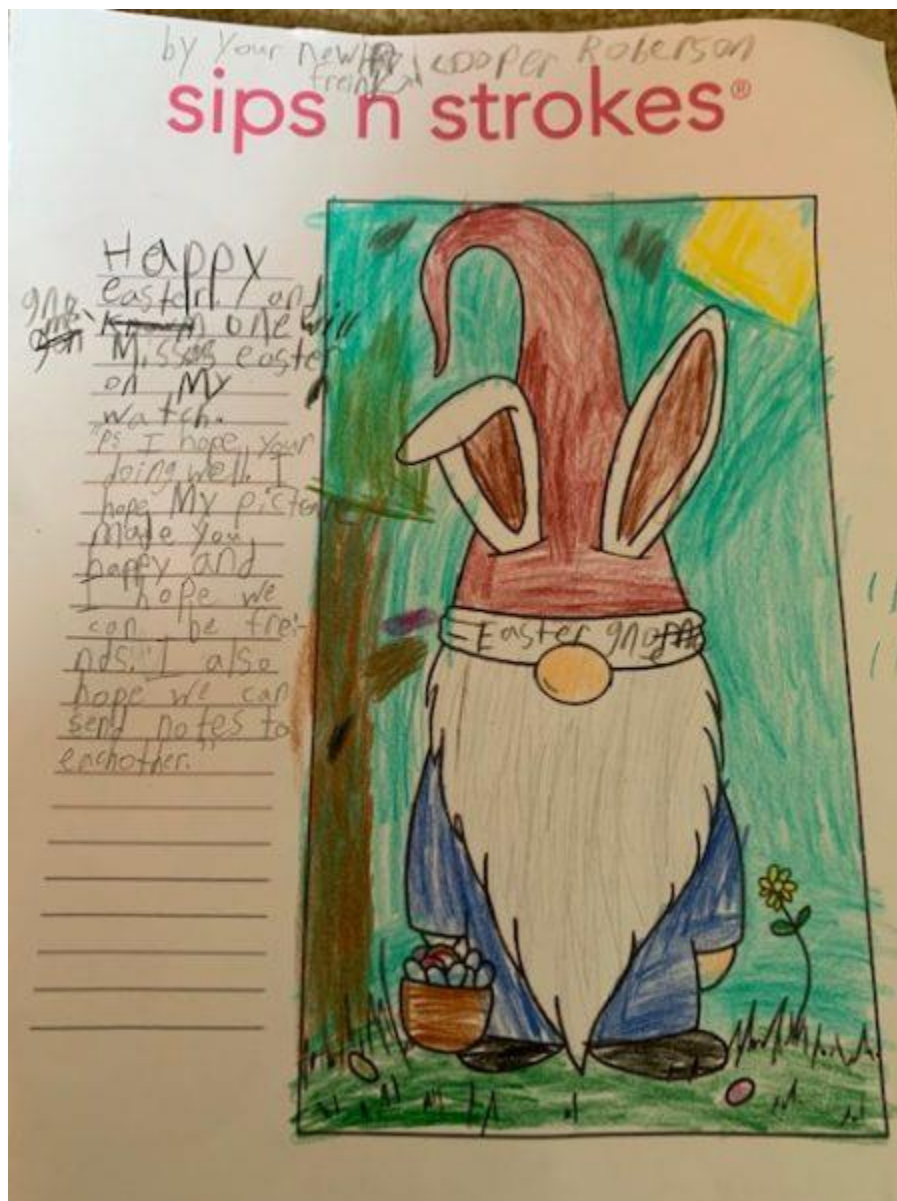
Georgia Southern alumni encourage community, adapt small business in trying times

April 13, 2020

For many small businesses, closing storefronts due to the Coronavirus pandemic has meant losing revenue and contact with customers. Focused on using art to boost the spirits of those in their Sandy Springs community, art studio owners and college roommates Sandra Lewis (MKTG, '92) and Kris Bleiler (ACCT, '91) are using the current crisis as an opportunity to offer new ways for their business to inspire and connect.

Lewis and Bleiler franchised a [Sips n Strokes](#) art studio in 2011. They have recently had to temporarily close their three art studios due to the current crisis. After losing their revenue source, they decided to use their business to reach those sheltering in care facilities without contact with family and friends.

"We saw news stories about nursing homes and how they were quarantining, not letting in any volunteers or family," said Lewis. "I thought how lonely must they feel, and so we started Color for a Cause to offer free downloadable coloring sheets."

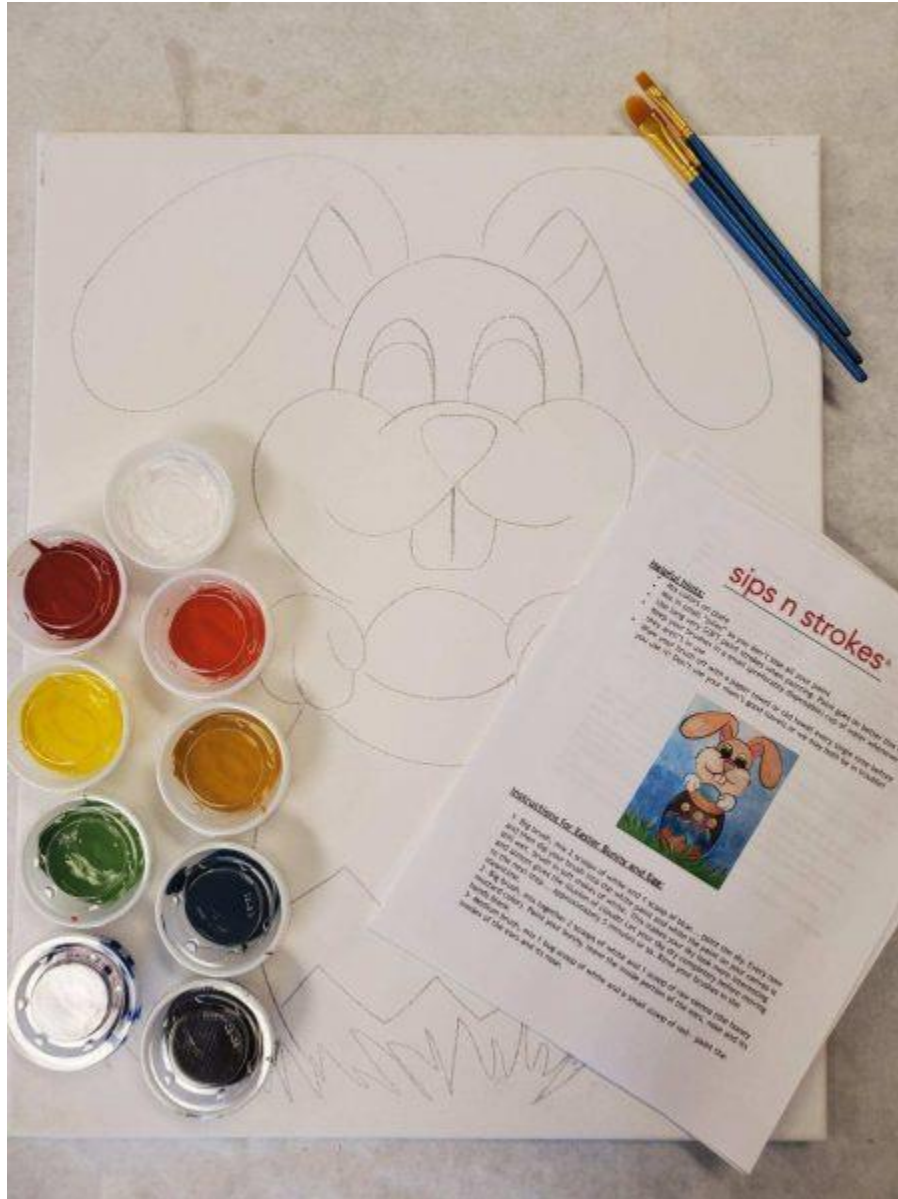


Color for a Cause coloring sheet

Color for a Cause provides both kids and adults with sheets to color and allows them to send a note of encouragement to patients in nursing homes.

“What we’re doing is compiling the entries we receive and putting them into a PDF and sending them to the nursing homes so they can print them and pass them out,” said Lewis.

They also started virtual paint classes and are selling “Sips n Strokes To Go” paint kits to customers for use at home.



“This is something we’ve been wanting to do for a long time and we thought here’s our chance,” said Lewis. “We switched our focus to take-home kits and in the first week we sold a couple hundred. By the second week we sold 600.”

They are grateful for their core customer base which includes other Georgia Southern alumni.

“The connections we’ve made through the Georgia Southern Alumni Association Atlanta Network have been invaluable to us,” said Lewis. “When you meet other alumni you want to help them however you can. And we have met people through the alumni association who will be lifelong friends.”

Through philanthropy, strong customer connections and a willingness to adapt, Lewis and Bleiler have found the formula to press forward with their small business and encourage others to do the same.

“Allow yourself a little time to grieve what you’ve lost in this trying situation, which is what we did,” said Lewis. “And then dig deep to find a way to make it work. Think outside the box, and even if you’re not able to be open right now, find ways to keep your business name out there.”

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