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March Entrepreneur Spotlight

March 31, 2015



After the tragic loss of her daughter, Grace Smith, to cancer, Laura Smith was inspired to start Panda On. Initially, Laura wanted to simply help her three living children move forward after losing their sister, who was an inspiration throughout her fight with pediatric sarcoma. Since then, their inspiration has grown and The Smiths want to share Gracie's light and encouragement with the world and start a movement.

The panda is significant because it was Grace's favorite animal. Panda On will sell panda bears and t-shirts that have a tag attached with a message of encouragement. Laura equates herself with other philanthropic merchandisers like Life is Good and Hallmark, as well as having some attributes of nonprofits like TeddyBearCancer foundation.

Panda On is not a nonprofit, but it is built on the values of charity and giving back to the community. Laura believes that the bears will be a great gift for anyone who needs positive reinforcement, whether they are ill or moving on to a new chapter of their life.

This will be the first startup for the Smiths. They know it will not come without its own difficulties, financial feasibility being the toughest to overcome for any startup. Right now the current costs are graphic design, website building, and product design.

Laura places a large emphasis on working with businesses that share similar values towards sustainability and community outreach. Panda On believes that there is more to business than making money. Touching people and uniting them to a cause is equally, if not more important.

Panda On was one of the first GENIE clients in Telfair County. When asked about working with the GENIE, Laura said, "BIG has helped guide me through the steps to becoming a business owner and has helped steer my dream toward reality. Suzanne is patient and personally interested in our success. It's great having the BIG team available because they think of new things to benefit the business and can view the business objectively."

Currently, Laura is focused on completing prototypes of the bear and shirt so she can start a kick starter campaign in 3 months. Laura's dreams for Panda On are BIG! She wants to make people's lives better and share her products and messages of encouragement all over the nation.