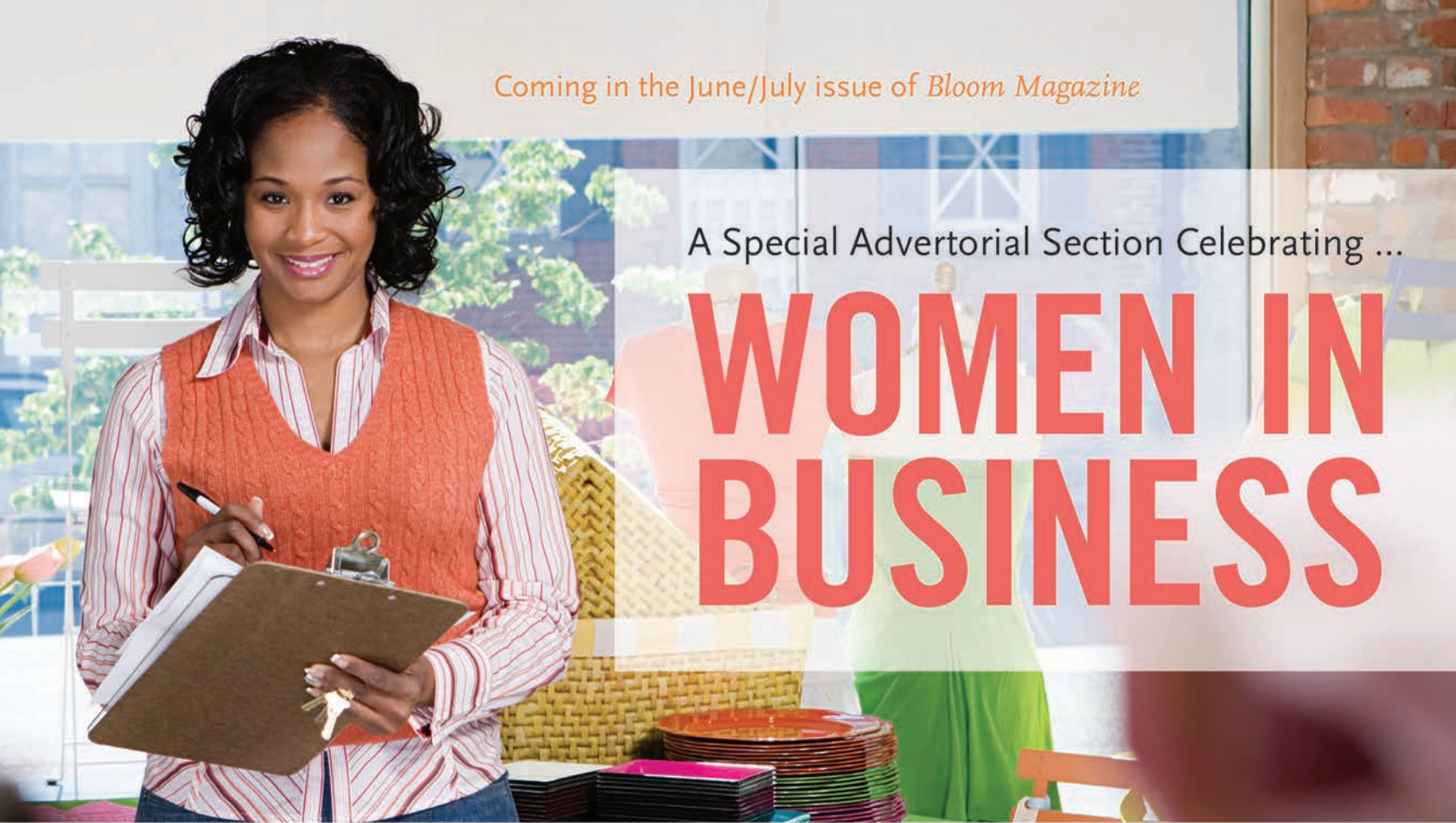


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Young Professionals

Owning a business or helping make one a success are ways we can contribute to a thriving community. In this special section, you'll meet 10 young professionals, all under 40, who are using their talents to help make Bloomington a great place to live and work.

B-Town Botanicals

Jesse Bunnell, Owner

Growing up, Jesse Bunnell spent time outside with his father, learning to grow plants and trees for landscaping projects. He would sit under a tree when it grew taller, shielded by its shade, and enjoy his accomplishment. He carried that knowledge throughout his life and into his first apartment, where he started growing plants on his patio, experimenting with hydroponics, and overrunning his home with peaches and 12-foot-tall tomato plants. He had found his passion.

Searching to fulfill his dream of owning a business, Bunnell considered opening a scooter rental shop, but learned the store where he bought soil, seeds, and supplies was closing. Seeing the potential, he followed his passion and opened B-Town Botanicals at 339 E. Winslow Road on January 8, with plans to eventually open more locations and a distribution center. "I want to just keep progressing and not stop," he says.

When people visit the store, Bunnell is eager to show his ebb-and-flow hydroponic setup in the window and share tips for growing. He explains how vegetative plants need 18 hours of light, and blooming and harvesting ones need 12 hours. Besides offering non-GMO supplies, B-Town Botanicals hosts free workshops where customers can learn basic home-growing skills. "I'm hoping to introduce a new generation of farmers—inner-city farmers," Bunnell says. —Linda Margison



Jesse Bunnell standing near an aisle of plant nutrients in his store, B-Town Botanicals, off Winslow Road. Photo by Stephen Spruill

RÄKE Cabinet & Surface Solutions

Hillary Detty, Human Resources Manager;
Keith Hanson, Operations Manager

When you talk to two key players in front office operations at RÄKE Cabinet & Surface Solutions, you probably won't hear them mention last year's record \$4.4 million in sales; the decades-long relationships the company has with some of the state's leading homebuilders; or RÄKE's state-of-the-art, 20,000-square-foot fabrication facility on East Dillman Road. But human resources manager Hillary Detty and operations manager Keith Hanson are quick to mention the core values everyone at the company shares. Number one is customer service. "Our goal is to treat our clients the way we like to be treated when we are the consumer," says Hanson, 32.

And while Detty is proud of the company's one-of-a-kind custom interiors developed for hospitals, schools, restaurants, and government offices, it's the work they've donated to nonprofit organizations like Habitat for Humanity of Monroe County and to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Bloomington that makes her happiest. "As far as something we do that I am personally proud of, it would have to be our local Give Back program started last summer," says the 37-year-old Detty. "That's having an impact on service organizations in our community."

Through the Give Back program, RÄKE donates 2 percent of all sales to local charities. Customers pick from a revolving list of organizations that change every three months. Beneficiaries have included Middle

Way House, WonderLab, Monroe County History Center, WildCare Inc., Toys For Tots, Wheeler Mission Ministries, Hoosier Hills Food Bank, and the Monroe County Humane Association.

Even the RÄKE name (pronounced "Rocky") harkens to a business philosophy that some would say reflects old-fashioned values. "The family name is Raake, but Rich [business owner Rich Raake] wanted to go back to the old spelling, to his roots, and to a simpler time where a quality product and exemplary customer service were the top priorities in business," says Detty, who handles accounts receivable and payable as well as human resources.

Both Detty and Hanson, a Peru, Indiana, native who handles scheduling, personnel, and production at RÄKE, emphasize that maintaining open, honest dialogue nurtures and improves trust and respect among colleagues. That's another core value at RÄKE.

"The thing I am most proud of is creating an environment that encourages growth and self-improvement," says Hanson. "Seeing our employees [there are 30] enjoying what they do and striving to better themselves and our company is a huge motivator. And being able to add to this team with new employees and seeing us grow has been a real source of enjoyment."

For more information, visit rakesolutions.com. —*Steve Chaplin*



Hillary Detty and Keith Hanson standing in the showroom for RÄKE Cabinet & Surface Solutions. Photo by Stephen Sproull



Hilary Key. Photo by Stephen Sproull

The Toy Chest

Hilary Key, Owner

In 2012, Hilary Key was doing neuroscience research for a doctorate degree when she realized she no longer wanted to pursue science. She searched her soul until she found her dream: social enterprise in the toy industry. "I wanted to run a for-profit business that had a built-in giving aspect," Key says. "I really believe in the power of play ... getting the right toys into kids' hands has long-term benefits because play is how children learn."

With degrees in biology, chemistry, and French, Key left her graduate program and went to work for The Toy Chest in Nashville, Indiana, as assistant manager. When the owners decided to sell the business in 2014, she saw an opportunity to launch her dreams and break into the toy industry. To incorporate a giving aspect, she created a nonprofit organization, Project Play, to operate alongside the shop. She and her husband, Danny, later opened a second store in College Mall in Bloomington.

Customers can purchase a toy at half price from The Toy Chest to donate to Project Play, which gives developmentally appropriate toys to kids. "We see toys as a lot more than Christmas presents," says Key, now 27. She has long-term plans to manufacture toys to better facilitate the business' giving aspect and make it more affordable. —*Linda Margison*



(l-r) David Grates and Devin Thomas. Photo by Martin Boling

Bear's Place

Devin Thomas, Owner; David Grates, General Manager & Equity Partner

Taking over ownership of an iconic business like Bear's Ale House and Eatery poses unique challenges, but as an avowed foodie, proud Indiana University graduate, and big fan of Bloomington, it was one that Devin Thomas was happy to take on. In the nearly three years since she and her husband, Andrew, took over the nightlife staple known more commonly as Bear's Place, they've brought new vitality to the fun, relaxed bar atmosphere that has drawn pre-game crowds, music fans, and bar crawlers out for the "Hairy Bear" cocktail since 1972. They've also made a number of improvements, from essential ones like upgrading kitchen equipment, renovating restrooms, and adding outdoor seating, to loftier ones, like emphasizing friendly customer service.

One special area of improvement was creating an all-new menu with a focus on tastier, made-from-scratch selections. "That was one of the areas where we saw we could grow and expand," Thomas, 33, says. "The menu was so limited before. Now we've put our focus on quality."

Thomas and her husband are involved in multiple family businesses in northeast Indiana, including NAPA Auto Parts stores,

restaurants, real estate—even a small family farm that provides Bear's Place with the menu's new 100 percent grass-fed beef. "I grew up working in the restaurant industry and my family loves food," Thomas says. "When we were looking for an opportunity to grow our family business, this just seemed like a natural fit."

They knew finding the right person to run the day-to-day operations was critical to carrying out their vision, and they found that person in general manager and equity partner David Grates. "David is our guy we go to for anything," says Thomas. "He is the man, he is the face of the business. He is the one you will see if you go into the restaurant."

Grates has been working in the service industry since he got his first job at a café in Michigan when he was just 14 years old. Two years ago, he was working as the general manager of a Bob Evans restaurant in Fort Wayne where he fostered strong relationships with his customers. One of the regulars he got to know was Thomas' father-in-law, who suggested that Grates might be the right person to manage Bear's Place.

"The very first time I came to Bloomington, it was to interview for the general

manager's spot," says Grates, who had entrepreneurship at the top of his list of career path goals. "I immediately loved the town and the atmosphere."

Grates says he immediately started getting acquainted with Bear's wide-ranging clientele, from the growing crowd of music students and faculty coming in for the new lunch menu to fans of the bar's legacy events, like Monday night comedy and Thursday night jazz. The front room is now open to the under-21 crowd, adding more students to the mix. "You really get a wide variety of people from different backgrounds at different stages in their lives," Grates says. "And every year has a new round of students you have to prove yourself to."

Grates has also nurtured newer traditions, like Tuesday night's songwriter showcase and late-night Thursday karaoke. And given the bar's close proximity to the IU Jacobs School of Music, "It's not like the karaoke you see in most places," Grates says.

"I stay involved by learning," says Grates. "And that's one thing this place provides. You wear so many hats and do so many different things. ... It really keeps you involved and excited." —*Tracy Zollinger Turner*



Eli Seidman. Photo by Martin Boling

Eli’s Sandwich Shoppe

Eli Seidman, Owner

While his classmates at the University of Kansas worked summer internships, Eli Seidman was gathering intel working in sandwich shops. In October, just 10 months after graduating with a degree in business management, he used that research to open Eli’s Sandwich Shoppe at 601 N. College in Bloomington. “I’ve always known I wanted to open my own business and I love food,” says Seidman. “I think I was about 12 when I first told my parents I wanted to open my own sandwich shop.”

Whether it’s for a quick lunch or a late-night bite, the elements that guarantee satisfaction at Eli’s Sandwich Shoppe are constant: snappy service at a prime 10th Street and College Avenue location, fresh-baked bread as the sandwich foundation, and a chocolate chip cookie that some already consider the best in Bloomington.

Seidman had originally envisioned opening his business in Lawrence, Kansas, home of his alma mater, but his sister attends IU and his mother is an IU alum. “So I decided to check out Bloomington, fell in love with the city, and decided this was the place for me,” the 23-year-old Seidman says. The shop serves lunch and dinner seven days a week and stays open until 3 a.m. Thursday through Saturday. For more information, visit elissandwichshoppe.com. —*Steve Chaplin*

Lahn Law

Amelia Lahn, Owner

“College students can face all the same legal issues non-students do—and then some,” says attorney Amelia Lahn, explaining her decision to open a practice largely devoted to the legal needs of Bloomington’s student population.

Lahn, 32, is a Bloomington native who graduated from Indiana University in 2006 with a bachelor’s degree in Italian and then earned her J.D. at the IU McKinney School of Law in Indianapolis. She began her career in the IU Office of Student Ethics, where for two years she gained experience with campus disciplinary procedures and the IU Code of Student Rights. She noticed that students facing serious charges often arrived unrepresented. “Every student is entitled to an advisor throughout the student conduct process,” says Lahn.

While she also practices general criminal law and family law, and represents IU faculty and staff in administrative and employment proceedings, much of Lahn’s practice focuses on students facing Title IX (sexual assault), alcohol-related, and other allegations, either in IU’s disciplinary process, in court, or both. “It’s incredibly rewarding to help students and their families in navigating what may at first seem a daunting process,” she says. “Just having someone on their side to explain the process can be a relief. Communication is the key.” For more information, visit LahnLawLLC.com. —*Steve Chaplin*



Amelia Lahn. Photo by Martin Boling



Nick Romy. Photo by Rodney Margison

Ardent Instruments

Nick Romy, Owner and Luthier

Nick Romy, luthier and owner of Ardent Instruments, will be the first to tell you that not only does every picture tell a story, every musical instrument does as well. The 29-year-old Bloomington native says he was overjoyed when an antique mandolin found its way to his shop at 628 S. Washington St. Once repairs and adjustments were complete, Romy set out to date the instrument. Though the penciled serial numbers were faded, a tilt to the correct angle revealed a ghostly impression—36994—dating it to 1917. “It’s playing great and will hopefully continue to do so for another 100 years,” he says.

Romy also has the street cred to soothe a client delivering a beloved instrument for repairs. Not only did he attend the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, he’s also a former employee of Bloomington’s late, beloved Roadworthy Guitars, and a Chicago School of Guitar Making graduate. Romy also worked as the shop manager at Chicago’s custom guitar and amp builder, Specimen Products.

“My training was mostly directed toward guitars, but all stringed instruments follow like principles,” says Romy, meaning if an instrument has strings, he can repair it. “Ardent fits my approach to my craft, my love for instruments,” he says. For more information, visit ardentinstruments.com. —*Steve Chaplin*



Bridgett DiVohl. Photo by Stephen Sproull

Royale Hair Parlor

Bridgett DiVohl, Owner

From hair art shows to a brand new, luxurious space designed for bridal parties, Royale Hair Parlor’s consistent growth and fresh creative energy stems from owner Bridgett DiVohl’s love of learning and sharing knowledge. “I love to share new information,” she says. “If I can have that in my work environment, then I feel really fulfilled.”

Originally from the Batesville, Indiana, area, DiVohl began styling hair at 18, landing her first apprenticeship at the upscale Mitchell Salon and Day Spa chain in Cincinnati, Ohio. Six years later, she moved to Chicago and worked for the Sine Qua Non salons, where she became a founding part of their education and training system as a cutting coach and product educator.

As she and her future wife, Steph, began looking into laying down roots and buying a home together, they researched more affordable creative cities where they might live. They settled on Bloomington, partly to stay close to Chicago, and partly because DiVohl already knew and loved it, having come to punk shows at Rhino’s Youth Center as a teenager. She was also ready for a career change—one where she spent less time behind the chair, so she set a goal to open her own salon.

“When I moved here from Chicago, I noticed that there was a lack of education-based salons,” DiVohl says. At Royale, DiVohl has more experienced stylists routinely train their less experienced counterparts in foundational techniques like cutting, styling, and highlighting. She also sends stylists to New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles one or two times a year to gather fresh ideas that they come back and share. While she has a core group of seasoned stylists, she prefers that her staff have a range of experience.

“I really love hiring someone right of school who has a really fresh eye and vision,” DiVohl says. “It’s fun to see them learning. I learn from them as well.” She credits consistent professional and creative development of her stylists for Royale’s growth. “I definitely think all the education and training we do fuels our staff to stay passionate about it and that fuels our success too. It’s important to stay inspired.”

Royale will celebrate five years in business this July. Six chairs have expanded into 10 stations, and sales are up almost 40 percent over a year ago. The lower level—which had been a place for office work and training—has been recently remodeled to offer a more exclusive experience for bridal parties. The new space is decorated with romantic touches, including velvet furniture, chandeliers, and floral décor, and includes styling and makeup stations as well as a changing room and lounge area.

On weekdays, DiVohl is hoping to use the new downstairs space to extend Royale’s educational reach to stylists in nearby towns like Columbus or Seymour who want additional training without incurring major travel expenses. Soon, she plans to focus on developing her training program and other entrepreneurial ideas full time.

Community engagement also drives DiVohl’s vision. As one of Gallery Walk’s auxiliary spaces, Royale hosts a reception for the artist the first month of each exhibit, then celebrates the accomplishments of her younger staff with soirees on the alternate First Fridays, giving them an opportunity to put on an artistic hair show.

As a young entrepreneur, Bloomington has continued to treat her, her wife, and their four dogs well. “I love that it’s a city where I felt very welcomed to start a new life, affordable enough to purchase a house, and start, and even expand, my business,” she says. “I felt very able as an out lesbian woman to be accepted in our community, to say I’m going to start a business, and be accepted with open arms.” —*Tracy Zollinger Turner*