

Main Street Matters

OCTOBER 2019 • A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

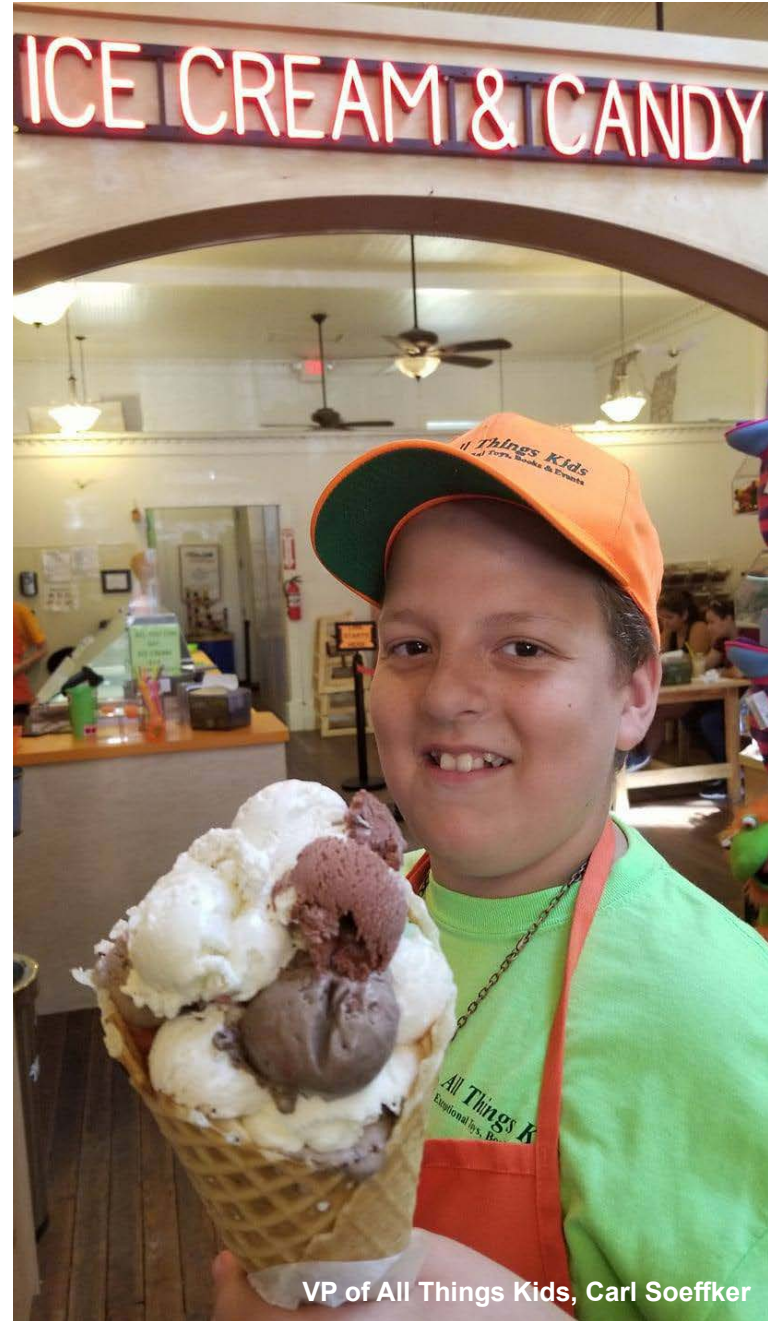
SWEET SUCCESS! THE JOURNEY FROM TOY STORE TO EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL

There's always been something special about All Things Kids in Georgetown. On opening day—eight years ago—the family-owned business was filled with wooden toys from Germany, doll houses from Italy, cuddly teddy bears from England, and award-winning games from around the world. Over the years, the business has added the top 100 classic children's books of all time—memories from our own childhoods, all bound in hard covers waiting to be signed, gifted, and kept for generations to come.

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Scoops is now on the road in their ice cream truck



It's all about the experience in All Things Kids

VP of All Things Kids, Carl Soeffker

SWEET SUCCESS! THE JOURNEY FROM TOY STORE TO EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL



By Karen Soeffker, Chief Experience Officer and Founder, All Things Kids

The Soeffker family, founders and owners of this downtown gem, moved to Georgetown when their son, Carl, was only five years old. The toy shop has been an extended play room for Carl and as he grew older, the store grew with him, adding new toys, books, and games appropriate for his age and interests.

The store also featured a play zone where Carl and customers could play with the unboxed toys, enjoy an afternoon story time, or hold a private birthday party. The store even offered childcare every Saturday evening, allowing parents some time-out to enjoy the Georgetown Square.

The concept was working well and even won the Texas Downtown Association's Best Downtown Business of 2013, but the business was to make its biggest transformation yet. The family recognized early on that brick-and-mortar stores could only compete with online retailers if they offered customers something that they couldn't buy online—the experience!

After studying downtown surveys to try to understand what Georgetown needed, the family rebuilt the play zone into an old-fashioned scooped ice cream parlor with 46 flavors all served on waffle cones baked fresh and all day in the store. They added floats, shakes, old-fashioned sodas, and over 500 kinds of candy to complete the 'Scoops' concept.



The play zone turned into an ice cream parlor

Customers loved Scoops, and toy sales also increased dramatically. The combination of air filled with music, amazing vanilla ice cream, and beautiful wooden toys, special events, and exceptional customer service proved to be an experience that customers want to repeat, over and over again.

That was over two years ago, and the store continues to enjoy year-over-year growth. They have even added an ice cream counter at their local ball park as well as a catering division, taking the ice cream parlor experience to weddings, parties, and events across the region with their cute Scoops ice cream truck.

All Things Kids truly does have everything kids (and kids at heart) love. However, there is one thing that you will never find at All Things Kids, something that really is not obvious until it is pointed out, yet it is the foundation of why this family from Europe wanted to open a toy store all those years ago. You will never find a toy that requires a battery! Based on the premise that children are curious and love to learn how to solve problems, the Soeffker family decided to surround their child with toys that he can play with, not toys that played with him. “Carl is now 14 and VP of the company and easily able to explain the business plan the company has in place while serving you ice cream and smiles at the same time,” says Karen Soeffker, who is Carl’s Mom—and Chief Experience Officer!



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

SYRISSA DOMINGUEZ
GRANGER MAIN STREET MANAGER



1. What is your hometown?

My hometown is Taylor; born and raised.

2. What Main Street city do you represent and how long have you been there?

My Main Street city is Granger. I have been here for two weeks so I’m brand new to the program!

3. What is your favorite spot in your downtown and why?

My favorite spot is literally on the stree—Granger still has areas with brick paved streets. You can really feel the history of the town when you stand on those streets!

4. What do you enjoy the most about the Main Street program?

I am overwhelmed by the amount of support and resources offered through the Main Street program. Everyone truly wants to see you succeed, and it shows!

5. What is the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?

“Remember: it’s a marathon; Not a race. These things take time and it will be hard. But, if it weren’t hard, everyone could do it”. It’s more of a motivational quote, but some of the best advice I’ve received!

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2008 BEST RESTORATION: WILLIAMSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE



By Connie Odom, Public Affairs Manager, Williamson County

The Williamson County Courthouse sits on high ground as a majestic centerpiece to Georgetown's beautiful town square with its copper dome visible from miles around. The current Williamson County Courthouse is the county's fifth courthouse. Built in the Beaux Arts architectural style, its four symmetrical sides showcase large columns under triangular pediments topped with terra cotta balustrades. Grand staircases lead into the building, which has been a hub for county government since it opened in 1911. Themis, holding the Scales of Justice, stands tall on top reminding visitors that this is a building dedicated to fairness and the law.

But the building did not always have its same grand appearance.

The courthouse saw many changes through the years in order to adapt for its various uses by the county. In the 1950s, an elevator was added to where one of the two elliptical staircases off the rotunda had been. In order to accommodate more county offices in the building, the two-story district courtroom was converted into a one-story courtroom and a third floor of office space was created.

However, it was the changes to the building's exterior that drew the ire of many long-time residents. In the 1960s, pieces of the terra cotta balustrades fell off the building. Fearing more would fall, the terra cotta was removed and a brick parapet was added. Many felt the square,

6. What's your favorite tip for someone in our economic development/downtown revitalization industry?

Don't count the hours. Count the milestones!

7. Who has been the most influential person in your career?

My Mother. She's passed away now, but in the 80s, she was a force to be reckoned with: a very smart and savvy business owner at a time when women weren't expected to own and operate large businesses.

8. What's your favorite inspirational quote?

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement" and "The way to get started is to quit talking and start doing!"

9. What's the hardest lesson you've learned?

I have always wanted to travel to Switzerland to soak up the mountains, the history, and of course, the chocolate!

10. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

In my spare time, I enjoy competing in BBQ cookoffs and spending time with my family.



Photo Credits: RSX Studios

brick top diminished the courthouse's once-grand appearance. So in 2004, Williamson County applied for and was awarded a grant from the Texas Historical Commission's Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program to restore the courthouse to its former glory.

Construction on the restoration began in 2006 and took nearly two years to complete, during which time the courthouse was completely closed for business. Most prominent among the changes was the replacement of the original terra cotta triangular pediments and balustrades on the exterior. On the inside, the district courtroom was restored to be a two-story courtroom, and the county courtroom across the hall also was restored, with slight modifications to accommodate current-day commissioners court meetings.

The Williamson County Courthouse celebrated a grand rededication in December 2007. The ceremony paid tribute to the building's historic roots and its renewed future. The restoration project was so successful it received the Best Restoration in the 2008 Texas Downtown Association Presidents Awards Program.

Along with its architecture, part of the courthouse's allure has been the role it played in several great scenes in Williamson County history. For example, it played a supporting role in the suffrage movement. Jesse Daniel Ames, a widow living in Georgetown, was treasurer of the Texas Equal Suffrage League in 1918. That year, the State passed a bill allowing

women to vote in state primaries. Ames and her co-workers registered 3,800 women to vote in 17 days at the courthouse.

It played a starring role in 1923, when the courthouse was center stage in the Burleson flogging case. This famous Ku Klux Klan trial was prosecuted by District Attorney Dan Moody and took place in the Williamson County Courthouse's 26th District Courtroom. The case was famous for being the first conviction of the KKK that resulted in jail time, leading to the decline of the national group. Dan Moody went on to be the youngest person elected governor in Texas.

Today, the courthouse is still the jewel of the Georgetown square. Although court cases are no longer tried in the building, the county's commissioners court still meets there on Tuesday mornings. The building has offices for the County Judge, County Treasurer, County Auditor, and other staff.

The building is open to the public during the week between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. The Williamson Museum offers tours of the building, relaying its rich history, architectural highlights, and a glimpse into the county's past. Tours are held Friday and Saturday afternoons. During the summer, people gather on the courthouse lawn. They sit in chairs or on blankets under the shade of the pecan trees, bring home-made picnics or local take-out, and listen to music on Friday nights. And during the winter, people gather on Main Street, drink hot chocolate, and watch the courthouse



SMALL BUSINESS CENTER STAGE: GEORGETOWN'S 600 DEGREES PIZZERIA AND DRAFTHOUSE



By Sammy Thompson (far left) and Mark Thompson (right), 600 Degrees Pizzeria and Drafthouse Owners

600 Degrees Pizzeria and Drafthouse in downtown Georgetown was the 2016 Texas Downtown Association President's Award winner for Best Downtown Business.

We believe a few of the reasons we have been successful for so long is because of the passion we have on a daily basis to do better—better product, better service, better understanding, and better training

of our great 600 Degrees family staff and team members.

Our philosophy has always been that deep down nobody actually wants to work, to be completely honest, in comparison to sitting in a nice cabana on the beach somewhere. But in reality, we all have to work, so our motto is LET'S MAKE IT FUN! This mindset, along with taking pride in our food and overall service experience for our guests, sums it all up.

One other very important note, and I added this last because it's the real reason we are an award-winning small business: we recognize where our blessings come from, and we thank God daily for this.



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