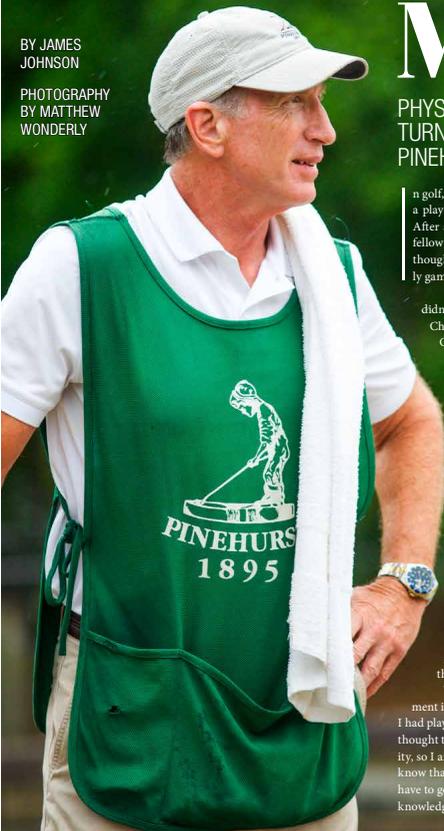


sports

Mulligan Man

BY JAMES
JOHNSON

PHOTOGRAPHY
BY MATTHEW
WONDERLY



PHYSICAL THERAPIST TURNED #1 CADDY AT PINEHURST GOLF COURSE

n golf, the word "mulligan" is used to describe when a player is given a second-chance, or a "do-over." After an unsatisfactory swing, a player can ask his fellow golfers for another crack at the ball and even though it is technically against the rules, in a friendly game, a golfer might just get that chance.

In life, mulligans are far less common. But that didn't stop former Fayetteville VA Medical Center's Chief of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Dr. Chris Chambers, from heading out of the office after 32 years, and picking up a bag of golf clubs instead. At an age when most people are looking to put their feet up and relax, Chambers sought to begin anew, as possibly the world's most overqualified golf caddy. At 55, Chambers got his mulligan, in the form of a new career, serving as a golf caddy for Pinehurst's Golf Course. "I knew I needed to stay active," said Chambers, who is now 63, even if he doesn't look it.

"All my years in rehabilitation, I knew that if you slowed down and stopped moving, that's a bad thing."

The Buffalo, New York native has been living in Fayetteville since 1977, and always had a keen interest in golf. It didn't occur to him, however, to make working in golf a second career until he spotted an ad in the newspaper after he retired.

"The Fayetteville Observer had an advertisement in the paper for caddies at Pinehurst, and I had played Pinehurst many times. I had always thought that it was a great iconic American golf facility, so I answered the ad," Chambers said. "I didn't know that there would be such a vetting process. You have to go through a phone interview to verify your knowledge of golf. If you pass that, you have to go to

be tested on your personality and prior drug use ... and if you pass your interview, you get called in for five days of training."

For those who've never set foot on the green, a golf caddy is a person who carries the player's bags or clubs and offers advice on strategy. For Chambers, who had always been a player up until this point, the job was far more physically demanding than he had anticipated.

"At that point, at 55 years old, I weighed about 200 pounds, which at 6 feet tall, wasn't that bad. I might have been a little overweight. Now that I look back on it, I was quite a bit overweight. I thought I was in pretty good shape, but not really, so I barely made it through the physical requirements," Chambers said. "There is a lot of dexterity involved. A lot of stamina involved. I barely made it through that, but they took a chance on me."

Chambers braved his first season at the Pinehurst course, but upon its completion, he said, he realized that he needed to be in better shape if he was going to keep up with his much younger co-workers.

"I created a fitness program for myself. I lost 30 pounds pretty quickly, just being a caddy," Chambers said. "It is an effective weight loss program, though I realize that it's not for everyone. I am in the gym two hours a day, five days a week, in addition to the caddy work."

The caddy work is nothing to scoff at either. According to Chambers, during his first five years as a caddy, on a typical day he would travel up to 36 holes a day, all the while "double bagging," which means carrying two golf bags.

"You'll be traveling seven to eight miles, carrying an extra 60 pounds," Chambers said. "It is very physically challenging, but it's a lot of fun. I love the people that I meet, and I do love golf. I knew when I retired that I didn't want to play golf every day, but that I wanted to be around it every day, so becoming a caddy sounded perfect."

The caddy job is one typically done by younger people, just starting out in their careers and looking to make some extra money, not financially secure retired doctors. Chambers says that the experience of working with younger people, struggling to pay their rent and sharing stories of their overactive social lives, has been an eye-opening one, as it has helped him see

As a caddy trainer, Chambers has been able to travel as far as China to train new caddies at some of the world's finest courses.

the world from a completely foreign perspective and remind him of his own youth.

"Some of the opportunities that I've been afforded by this ... putting myself in the caddyshack, I have met a lot of young people, who have been victims of poor choices, working very hard right next to me," Chambers said.

"If I hadn't put myself in that position, I never would have met them. I will hear them struggle with their rent, and their bills and hear about their lives. I never have those discussions at the Highland Country Club. They happen here though, and it makes me thankful for what I have."

"Though it has been rare, he says that he has noticed some of his peers treating him differently, or behaving as if serving as a caddy was somehow reductive, which he views as an unfair and elitist point of view. "I don't see the caddy as an employee of the player. I see it as a partnership," Chambers said. "If you start that relationship with mutual respect, you will be off to the races from there. I've had some of my peers who, well, they could not believe that I was taking on this job. They could not see me going from being a member of the golf club to working for it. But

I have been a worker all of my life. I grew up, kind of poor, single mom, four kids. It wasn't hard for me to imagine, but some of my peers couldn't imagine how they could make that switch ... I think it is kind of shortsighted."

Chambers' popularity among players at Pinehurst and his own worth ethic, has led to his being asked to assist the Caddy Master Enterprises in its efforts to train other caddies, not just in North Carolina, but at resorts across the globe. As a caddy trainer, Chambers has been able to travel as far as China to train new caddies at some of the world's finest courses. In a way, traveling around the world, visiting exotic resorts and golf courses, is exactly what a lot of retirees long for, only Chambers is being paid for it.

"I needed something more stressful than sitting around the house, after being in the medical field for so long. I couldn't just go to doing nothing," Chambers said. "Being allowed to be in these beautiful places, doing what I love to do? I feel like I'm getting away with murder." ☛

"Being allowed to be in these beautiful places, doing what I love to do? I feel like I'm getting away with murder."



GIVING

The Vision Resource Center opened its doors in 1936, as the Cumberland County Association of the Blind. Since the beginning, the non-profit's mission has been to provide an outlet for members of Cumberland County's blind community to leave their homes, experience life and gain independence.



Leading the Way

BY JAMES JOHNSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW WONDERLY
IT WAS DURING A TRIP to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C. last year, that Terri Thomas, Executive Director for Cumberland County's Vision Resource Center, saw something she'll never forget. One of the center's members, a veteran who like so many other members, had lost her vision in service to our country, had tears streaming down her face during the Changing of the Guard ceremony.

"I said, 'Why are you crying? You can't see what they are doing,' and she said, 'I can hear the taps of their shoes, and I think of all of my brothers, and everyone who gave up everything for this country.'" Thomas said, "And I just lost it."

That was one of the countless moments that Thomas says has made serving Cumberland County's visually impaired community a gift. "You are giving that person a life that they might not have been able to have, or once had, but never thought they'd be able to have again," Thomas said. "It is a very humbling experience. It is so much bigger than me."

The Vision Resource Center opened its doors in 1936, as the Cumberland County Association of the Blind. Since the beginning, the non-profit's mission has been to provide an outlet for members of Cumberland County's blind community to leave their homes, experience life and gain independence. Through the Vision Resource Center, the visually impaired and blind are given access to classes and activities



Left: Thomas considers working with the visually impaired one of the most important things she has done in her life. Right: Thomas Center offers their "Out of Sight" Dining Event, where guests can do a blindfold and experience eating their meal without their vision. Their 2nd Annual Out of Sight Chicken Wing Cook-Off will be held this June.

that might be difficult or impossible for them to participate in otherwise. The center offers summer camps, youth programs, braille classes, healthy living programs that include yoga and other forms of exercise, arts and crafts activities, van transportation to and from the center and a host of other regular services.

For Thomas, a Fayetteville native who spent her early career working in the corporate world of the pharmaceutical industry, working with the visually

impaired was never something she would have predicted for herself, though she now considers it one of the most important things she has done in her life. Thomas had left her corporate job in Raleigh and moved back to Fayetteville nearly a decade ago to take care of her ailing father, and had at first wanted to find a career working with the elderly, until Amy Henderson, a friend of hers from church who was visually impaired, told her about a job opening at the Vision Resource Center.

"I said, 'What kind of job is it?' and she said, 'Working with blind people.'" When Thomas said that she didn't know anything about working with blind people, Amy responded, "You said you liked working with old people, well we're old, and we need you at the center!"

Thomas joked, "I went to the interview and it was the oddest interview on Earth. They just passed out these papers with questions on them, and I was saying to myself, 'What is this job?'" They told you nothing. Well, I got the job and my life was changed."

Thomas discovered that the job entailed more than working with the old. The blind community includes people of all ages and backgrounds and Thomas immediately recognized that activities needed to be tailored to the needs of everyone involved.

"Everyone is different, so we try to do things that everyone is interested in, [we] go to a variety of activities." Some of these things Thomas might not be interested in herself, but she wants to know what interests those who come to the center. "Right now some of them are trying to talk me into skydiving, and I am afraid of heights, but it isn't about me, you know?"

According to Thomas' friend Amy Henderson, who has been attending the center for nearly 10 years, Thomas was a breathe of fresh air.

"She has taken that organization from 20 to 90 percent," Henderson said. "Her personality and communication skills, and her desire to do all she can for people who can't do all they can..." she is just a naturally nurturing person."

Henderson says that the center used to only have a handful of mundane activities for members a month, but Thomas has taken it upon herself to



The center offers summer camps, youth programs, braille classes, healthy living programs that include yoga and other forms of exercise, arts and crafts activities, and van transportation to and from the center. Below: VRC Office Manager Alix Worrell, Amy Henderson & Terri Thomas



completely revitalize the program, more than doubling memberships, increasing the staff, adding movie-going events, out of town activities, visits to live theaters, museums and more.

"It has changed my lifestyle completely," said Henderson, who had at first joined the center reluctantly, at the urging of a friend. Henderson, like countless other visually impaired residents, says that she spent much of her time before joining the program at home, with sparse interaction with the outside world. According to Thomas, one of the biggest challenges for people after recently losing their vision is remaining social. "Close friends will treat it as if it is contagious, and just stop visiting or spending time with them," Thomas said. "There is a stigma attached."

For members like Henderson, the center is a gateway to the rest of the world.

"I would not hesitate to recommend it to others," Henderson said. "You can ask anyone attending and they will automatically tell you how grateful they are for this service ... In addition to exercise, we have been introduced to yoga classes and line-dancing. We go to the farmer's market and on boat rides, and last year, we went on a tour of Washington D.C. and the White House. We bowl now. We go to the theatre here and out of town. We attend shows at the Crown Coliseum, the winery and we go to independent living classes four to six weeks in the year. They teach us how to clean house, cook without injuring ourselves, wash and dry our clothes, and they even teach us how to be careful in the house. The truth is, the opportunities we have are endless. We do everything that sighted people do."

With membership increasing from 20 to almost 150 people, since Thomas took over seven years ago, the Vision Resource Center budget has become tighter and the need for volunteers has grown.

Those interested in volunteering, donating or becoming members of the Vision Resource Center are urged to go to www.visionresourcecentercc.org.

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BUSINESS

VISIONARY MAN: Gordon Johnson Architecture

BY JAMES JOHNSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW WONDERLY

AS A STUDENT AT WATAUGA High School in Boone, North Carolina, Gordon Johnson was the kind of kid who drew every chance he got. Remember the kid who always had a sketchbook handy, who regularly turned in homework with doodles in the margins? Johnson was just like that. He continued on with his love of drawing and began designing structures—both large and small in scale—which led to the job he has today where he is one of the area's most sought after architects.

Johnson never had to sacrifice his dream to get a "real job"; he simply combined the two. Today, he runs Gordon Johnson Architecture out of his Hay Street office in downtown Fayetteville. In June of 1999, he started his business, which has grown to specialize in public sector design work. Johnson's firm has been responsible for literally hundreds of building designs which can be seen all over the county. From firehouses and schools, to City Hall and the Cumberland County Courthouse, there are examples of his work every which way you turn. Some of the most notable are the Wyatt Visitors Pavilion Complex at the Cape Fear Botanical Garden and the Fayetteville Area Transportation Museum Annex. He is currently at work on the expansion project at the Fayetteville Regional Airport, a



renovation which will include a newly reorganized ticketing area, expanded TSA security checkpoints, and a whole new second level concourse.

Advantages

According to Johnson, the field of architecture is competitive, particularly when bidding on projects for the city. What gives him an edge over competitors is his ability to work within tight budgets and meet even tighter deadlines. "You are juggling the owner's budget with the desire to come up with the solution," he said. "The creativity, the variety, and diversity of work we get is what challenges me to keep doing this."

What is his advantage? Well, unlike other firms with larger staffs and greater overhead, he is the only architect on his payroll. "I don't have to ask anybody in the firm how to do something. I am experienced. I don't have to second guess myself. There is an efficiency to that."

A Solo Show

Johnson had his taste of working on a staff with too many chefs in the kitchen. After graduating from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 1990, he became a co-owner of a larger firm, Shuller Ferris Johnson + Lindstrom Architects, which was what brought him to Fayetteville in 1994. For five years, Johnson continued to learn and worked among the other architects. He realized, during that time, that he prefers to work alone. "When I was part owner of a much larger firm, I spent most of my time managing other people rather than doing design work. I was losing time managing others rather than my creativity," Johnson said.

In 1999, determined to keep his own venture small and flexible, Johnson left



From firehouses and schools, to City Hall and the Cumberland County Courthouse, there are examples of Gordon Johnson Architecture work every which way you turn. One of the most notable is the Wyatt Visitors Pavilion Complex at the Cape Fear Botanical Garden.

Johnson is currently at work on the expansion project at the Fayetteville Regional Airport, a renovation which will include a newly reorganized ticketing area, expanded TSA security checkpoints, and a whole new second level concourse.

the partnership and started his own business. He explained, "I have kept my firm small, to keep control."

Building Spaces

When Johnson was working on the Visitors Complex for the Cape Fear Botanical Garden, he received a generous budget. Johnson enjoys when the scale of an operation comes with a sizable budget, as it allows for more creative control, but he also wanted to research what kind of space would serve the Garden best. In preparing for the design, he explored botanical gardens across the country and investigated the designs that were both inviting and practical.

"I visited about half a dozen gardens up and down the East Coast. A lot of that was to see how they dealt with the visitors and what needs were needing to be met," Johnson said.

Eventually, he discovered the ways in which the Cape Fear Botanical Garden could succeed. The answer? Rentable event spaces.

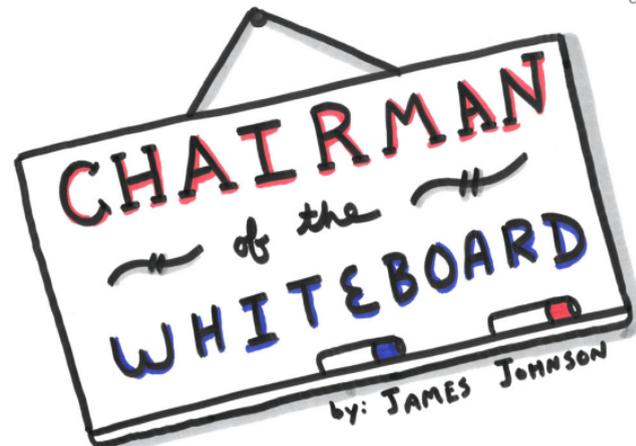
Johnson decided then the Visitors Complex would be built to host multiple events like weddings, charity auctions or business parties that could all happen, if the need would ever arise, simultaneously. The building would be equipped with two kitchens and designed with each part of the building set up to function separately. His final design, a sprawling 30,000 square foot building, with an extra 3,000 square feet of space upstairs so offices could be added at a later date, is indeed a popular venue for charities and functions.

Envisioning the Way

According to Johnson, his firm handles 10 to 20 designs a year, varying widely in scale and difficulty. Recently the firm has completed a new fire station, a forensics lab for the city, and is working on a new law enforcement and emergency management training center in Spring Lake. Johnson says that architecture takes a considerable amount of imagination and patience, as one typically won't see the results of designs in real life for several months or even years.

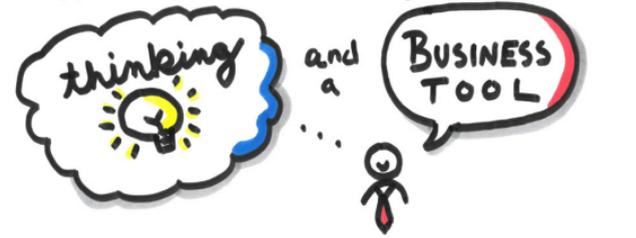
Visualization, then, is a key element in Johnson's success. Years ago, as a high school boy, he may not have envisioned one day standing at the helm of his own architectural firm, but he imagined a way forward and let the path become clear as he went. He let drawing lead the way. He kept drawing. He kept working. "You have to," he said, wisely, "have the vision in your head." ☺

For more information and to see more a complete listing of Johnson's designs, visit www.gordonjohnsonarchitecture.com.



MIKE "MUDDY" SCHLEGEL

uses his drawing as a



Mike "Muddy" Schlegel is a smart guy. As he was growing up, his intelligence led him to learning about things others might have considered to be too complex or even dull. He received his Masters in Watershed Science specializing in collaborative watershed planning from Colorado State University. The downside of being such a smart guy is the difficulty one finds in communicating ideas to strangers who have little interest in the science of watersheds or any other potentially complex subject. It was in facing this challenge that Schlegel discovered his true calling, a career he never knew existed, but somehow he found himself "drawn" to. Excuse the pun.

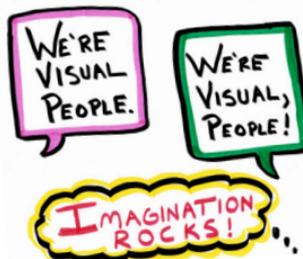
In the fall of 2013, Schlegel took part in a class on "visual thinking," the idea of using visual stimuli, like say, a whiteboard and a dry erase marker, to communicate ideas, tell stories and organize thoughts. For Schlegel, the class was a revelation. "I thrived in that class. That class was a light bulb moment. I realized I had always been a visual thinker and never realized that was a thing. I came away from that course with permission to draw."

Since that day, Schlegel hasn't put down his marker. "Our brain recognizes images faster than it recognizes words," Schlegel said. "I began to put it to use in my own life, so when I would write a list I would draw a little icon beside items on the list. Just scanning what was on that list, the icons would pop right out."

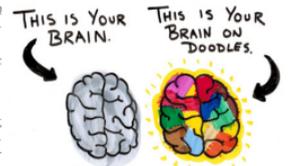
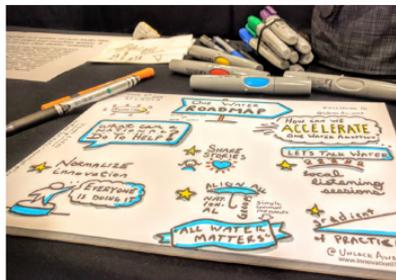
Schlegel has found the act of visual thinking to be incredibly helpful in his work as program manager for water resources at Triangle J Council of Governments, based in Raleigh, and for other organizations. Suddenly meetings were more than just words



Diane Bleck, founder of The Doodle Institute, asked Schlegel to come on as co-instructor for the institute.



WHITEBOARD ACADEMY
As of January, Schlegel is working full-time as founder of the Whiteboard Academy.



"We are visual thinkers, and we believe hand-drawn sketches can unlock innovation and help you focus on what matters."

WHEN YOU PUT PEN TO PAPER,



SOMETHING #Magical HAPPENS

and note taking, they were interactive experiences. While Schlegel doesn't consider himself a great artist, he did find that by visually representing ideas, he could grab the attention of his listeners in a way words alone couldn't.

Schlegel found himself having more fun and having more creative thoughts by just putting pen to paper. As he used these techniques of using simple icons or graphics with groups, meetings came alive. "People were leaning in and getting engaged," he said.

Seeing the value of visual thinking in a business setting, Schlegel set out to learn more about the practice. In 2015, he took part in two online courses. The first was a course called the Verbal to Visual Classroom with Doug Neill, and the second was a course through the Doodle Institute where Schlegel became a certified graphic recorder. "Really quick, 'graphic recording' is when you are listening to a conversation and you are capturing the highlights in a visual way," Schlegel said. "And 'graphic facilitation' is when you are guiding the room and collecting everyone's ideas in a visual way." Diane Bleck, the woman who started The Doodle Institute and who has been working with companies large and small for 20 years, became Schlegel's mentor.

A year after gaining his certification, Schlegel says he was contacted by Bleck, who asked him to come on as a co-instructor for the institute. It was through Bleck's example Schlegel decided he wanted to fully invest himself in his new passion. As of January, Schlegel is working full-time as founder of the Whiteboard Academy. On the homepage of his website, it reads, "We're visual thinkers, and we believe hand-drawn sketches can unlock innovation and help you focus on what matters," and Schlegel is available for "virtual coaching, online



Mike Schlegel and Diane Bleck, creators of Innovation Think Pad, have led more than 300 Innovation Sessions with companies large and small.

courses, workshops, visual note taking, graphic facilitation and infographics."

Through the Whiteboard Academy, Schlegel hopes to help businesses and organizations learn how to put visual thinking to work for them. "There are two kinds of people, visual spatial and logical sequential. In traditional educational programs, our schools teach

to a specific kind of person. The logical sequential individual has been favored over the visual spacial. As people go through school, we basically teach them logical sequential ways of thinking. But drawing is a thinking tool. Drawing can be seen as a verb and as a noun," Schlegel said. "This is about ideas and not art. I mean, I am a colorblind lefty, and I draw in front of people for a living."

Denise Bruce, Environmental Outreach Manager at Sustainable Sandhills, hired Schlegel in 2016 to help attendees at the UNC Clean Technology Summit and the Sandhills Clean Energy Summit Community Vision

make sense of the scientific facts and figures within the presentations. "Working with Mike is like having a videographer with a pen, that's the best way I can describe it." At the Community Vision event, Bruce was in charge of taking pictures of Schlegel throughout the presentation as he drew. "I was listening

to the people talk and watching him draw and he was making this entire world. His illustrations were beautiful, and even though it was very info-heavy, [the information] was still very digestible. He's extremely good at what he does."

Schlegel, unlike many visual recorders, is unusually comfortable with public speaking. He isn't certain where his confidence comes from, but he feels it can be summed up with a story from his life. Schlegel is the father to three daughters. They are the reason he earned the nickname "Muddy," as "Muddy Waters" was determined to be his Indian Princess name. On his 40th birthday, Schlegel said, he reached out to his three daughters for life advice.

"They say, 'You aren't good at everything,'" Schlegel said. "And I'm like, 'Wait a minute girls, that is just hurtful.' And my middle daughter said, 'Don't worry, you are awesome at some things.' Then my oldest daughter says, 'Just be yourself and you'll be fine.' I guess I gave up on perfect, in favor of awesome. Screw perfect. That gave me a lot of the confidence I needed to share visual ideas in front of all of these people."

To learn more about Schlegel and visual thinking as a business tool visit the Whiteboard Academy at whiteboardacademy.com.



BUSINESS

All That Glitters

BY JAMES JOHNSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW WONDERLY



Manager Joe Brunais with a picture of the late Rhudy Phillips



Some of the generals who've shopped at Rhudy's



A display case in the jewelry showroom

During 82 years on this planet, Rhudy Phillips managed to collect many friends but also a few detractors. In fact, when the Army veteran-turned-accountant decided to open his own pawn shop at 2410 Murchison Road in 1962, several of those critics made it known exactly what they thought.

"Everyone told him he was crazy," said Joe Brunais, manager of what is now known as Rhudy's Jewelry Showroom. "He borrowed \$1,000 and went into the pawn shop business in a small portion of a building that, at that time, was a school, (and) in what at the time was considered the worst location you could get. He did it part-time for the beginning and after a few years, in the late '60s, he decided to go full-time."

Brunais went to work for Phillips in the mid-1970s, but when the shop first opened it wasn't like any business Brunais had ever worked for. He has stuck around for 42 years as a result.

A unique policy helped Rhudy's gain favor in this military town in those early years. Unlike other pawn shops that cashed soldiers' checks for a fee, Phillips decided against charging soldiers for the service and instead required only that they buy an item at the pawn shop valued at \$1 or more. The move boosted business.

"We sold a lot of music back then and we sold a lot of electronics back then but the check cashing was the beginning, and it wasn't until 1979 that gold was deregulated, and business went way up," Brunais said. "And that's when we branched out into the jewelry."

In 1979, Phillips purchased \$10,000 in jewelry chains, which he would sell at his shop from a cigar box behind the counter.



Rhudy's sells more than jewelry



Fine-tuning design work

"One of the successes there, was that we sold gold by the gram, as opposed to most of the major retailers who were selling them by the piece," Brunais said. "When (customers) start weighing a piece they bought from us far less, they recognize the real value."

The shop's jewelry became so popular that it went from being sold out of a cigar box to being sold out of a small back room. Eventually, it became the core of the business, prompting Phillips to change the shop's name from Rhudy's to Rhudy's Jewelry Showroom.

After it committed to selling jewelry, Rhudy's added related services, including jewelry repair, setting stones and engraving. The shop began manufacturing its own jewelry designs as well as doing custom work.

"It just has grown and grown ever since," Brunais said. "I think a lot of that was because Mr. Phillips was a terrific P.R. person. He liked people. It wasn't about the money for him. Money wasn't what drove him. He didn't have a house at the beach, he didn't gamble, he didn't chase women. It was all about taking care of the people. He was very service-oriented. We try to operate the same way today as we did then."

Phillips had his values instilled in him, while growing



Donna Fonke

up on a farm in Virginia, before the military brought him to Fayetteville. Those values, Brunais believes, continue to be reflected in the way the business pays attention to customers' needs to this day.

Because Rhudy's is so focused on its customers, the staff is well attuned to their buying habits. Brunais says most of the shop's regular customers are women. But the customers who tend to show up during the biggest shopping periods – just before Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Christmas – are men. Typically, they come in at the last minute. Rhudy's staff is there to help them.

The commitment to customer service and customer relationships has paid off in customer loyalty. Some customers have relied on Rhudy's for decades.

"Once someone is a customer of ours, they usually stay with us," Brunais said. "We have people who send us jewelry from all over the country. Jewelry has memories. It is very important to people. 'This is my mother's ring,' 'my grandmother's ring.' They don't want just anyone working on them."

These one-on-one relationships are one reason why Brunais says that Rhudy's isn't worried about losing customers to online shops. According to Forbes magazine, online jewelry sales make up only 4 to 5 percent of the

industry sales, and Brunais believes that is unlikely to change.

"The thing is, with jewelry most people want to see it and touch it," Brunais said. "A picture of a ring doesn't mean it is the ring that you're getting and you don't know how the photo has been corrected for color. It is very hard to sell online."

Phillips died in May of 2015. Three of his children, Kenny Phillips, Chris Phillips and Donna Fonke, now run it.

In the years since Phillips first opened his shop, it has filled the building that once was occupied by a trade school, and expanded further, adding sections for selling car audio equipment, photo finishing, electronics and, most recently, home automations, which can be operated via mobile iOS or Android devices.

"We'll go in to wire a house so that everything in it can be operated via your iPad," Brunais said. "We started doing that last year."

Today, Brunais says, the shop employs 45 people, including four master jewelers, and it takes up more than 18,000 square feet.

Currently, Rhudy's is gearing up for what promises to be a hectic holiday season. Last year, holiday shopping in November and December brought in \$658.75 billion nationally, according to the National Retail Federation. That was up 4 percent over 2015 due to a strengthened economy. This year, sales are expected to increase another 3.6 to 4 percent, for a total of \$678.75 billion to \$682 billion.

As of now, Brunais says Rhudy's has no immediate plans for any more large expansions, or revenue streams. But he says one can never say never. As Rhudy Phillips showed his nay-sayers, crazier things have happened – and are still succeeding. 🍀