

Age is no barrier for young entrepreneur

By Angela Oliver Messenger-Inquirer | Posted: Sunday, July 27, 2014 12:00 am

When Aleisha Jones applied for her business license at age 19, she was somewhat nervous.

"It was intimidating to see people older, more established than me, but my youth gives me an upper hand in some ways," she said.

"Nothing against older photographers, but it allows me to appeal to people my age or younger."

Jones, 21, owns AE Photography.

"Deep down, I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit," she said. "But when I wasn't old enough to get a job and make money for myself, I knew this would be a good side business, and it's something I love."

Jones got into photography as a teen, winning the Grand Champion title in the state's 4-H photography competition with her shot of the Glover H. Cary Bridge during the 2011 Bridge Day, the city's first in 71 years.

"I don't just see it as taking pictures. I see it as capturing memories," she said. "When you're in that moment, you might not think it's a big deal, but when you look at the photo 20, 30, 100 years from now, you'll realize why that moment was important. You'll be glad you still have it."

Though she inherited her business savvy from her mother, an equine therapist and entrepreneur, Jones said she was also inspired by her high school senior portraits. She took them alongside one of her horses, Indy — "Indy, like Indiana Jones, ya know? We got him in Indiana," said Jones, who graduated from Majesty Academy in 2011.

"When I saw the final pictures, I was amazed," she said. "I never knew I could look that good. That's the same feeling I want to bring to my clients. Well-done, professional pictures can really make people feel good about themselves."

From that point, she worked as an intern for local photographers, studied techniques independently and practiced.

"You can read all day, but if you don't go out and practice, and apply what you read, you won't get any better," she said.

Her most popular requests are for senior portraits and portraits of groups of friends. Wedding, family and maternity photo shoots are also client favorites.

The photo shoots are mostly outdoors or at the client's home, and Jones said she prefers to keep it that way.

"I don't plan to open a studio," she said. "When people are in a studio, they tend to be more posed and stiff, but when I get them outside, in their house or just in their element, they're more relaxed. They can be who they really are."

Despite naysayers, Jones said she was encouraged by Michael Boyd, a professor of business technology and administration at Owensboro Community and Technical College.

"He really stresses the importance of being smart about your business and doing what you want," she said. "There was a lot of negativity from people who were older than me, but he's the reason I went after my business, and it's changed my life."

Boyd, who also owns a limited liability company, said he admires the mindset and energy of young entrepreneurs, though "youth can be a part of you, no matter your calendar age."

"Aleisha has done an excellent job with her pricing model, building a customer base and finding ways to make her product better," Boyd said. "We'd talk about her plans, but she's done it on her own. She's made us all very proud."

He advises any entrepreneur to make sure they bring in more money than they expend to stay afloat.

"You also have to spend time in your industry, gain exposure," he said. "And you have to persevere. A lot of things will go wrong, and it's easy to quit."

Before applying for a business license, Jones said it's important for entrepreneurs to have a strong knowledge of tax laws and other laws of the given industry.

"Do your homework, know what you're getting into," she said. "Also, find mentors in your industry who are better than you. They'll help you get there."

The medical receptionist and OCTC business administration major was recently accepted to the University of Southern Indiana and will attend in fall 2015. Her goal is to become a business professor while keeping AE Photography on the side. She also hopes to pursue other business ventures, including a candle company.

"There were a lot of people who told me I was too young or that I couldn't do this," she said. "But I did. That's one of the reasons I want to be a professor; I want to show students that they can do whatever they're really passionate about. Age isn't a barrier."

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Photo by Jenny Sevcik, Messenger-Inquirer/jsevcik@messenger-inquirer.com, 691.7294 Aleisha Jones, who is studying business administration at Owensboro Community & Technical College and owns AE Photography, said Wednesday during an interview at Smothers Park that she was amazed after receiving her high school senior portraits and decided to start her own photography business, so she could bring the same job she felt from her portraits, to her future clients.