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WineStyles – A Total Wine Experience

With the New Year brought an exciting new endeavor for Rendall Thomas, owner and franchisee of metro Milwaukee's first WineStyles retail store. Rendall, a former New York City television producer and director, and his wife, Tina, are also relatively new residents in Milwaukee. They made the decision to move here to be closer to family members living in the Midwest. Owning a business has been an intriguing and attractive enterprise for Rendall.

Because it offers peace of mind and a general business model, Rendall wanted to open a franchise business. He explored many franchise options before deciding on WineStyles; brought to mind by another family member. Wine has long been a personal passion of Rendall and his wife. His positive experience with the franchisor's professionalism and responsiveness was a large factor in his decision. Additionally, visiting other WineStyles' stores helped to clarify his ideal store concept.

With his franchise selected, Rendall also explored education options. His professional experience with a production company helped him gain valuable business savvy; though he wanted to learn lessons specific to entrepreneurs. He began exploring UW-Milwaukee's website for courses intended for business owners. Rendall found value in many of the Small Business Development Center's offerings.

Among the courses Rendall gained from, First Steps to Entrepreneurship impressed him with the number of resources on how to get a business idea into motion. Another instance, Meaningful Market Research, was valuable in learning where to turn to understand and research your target market. Since his means of communicating with his wine loyalty club members is through email, the course, Electronic Marketing Strategies, proved useful by providing tactics to make the most of communicating with them. With the decision to open a franchise business, the legal advice and tips on selecting a franchisor were practical to his experience taught during SBDC's Franchise Seminar. The course, Hiring and Firing, is sure to come into play with the team of staff members Rendall is now working to form; hopefully using less of the latter he joked.

He remarked on the many factors in operating a business brought to his attention during various courses, helping him better prepare and plan. In the case of Tax Compliance for the New Business course, he remarks, *"learning directly from tax experts on regulations to watch out for as a business owner and resources on where to go for more information if there were questions on taxation was invaluable information in avoiding future issues."*

After a flurry of activity surrounding store construction, setup, and inventory orders, WineStyles opened on January 12, 2008. In the days since opening, Rendall is delighted by the store's progress. He already has 19 people signed up for his wine club loyalty program. Also, roughly 35 people attended his first public wine tasting this past Saturday – not bad for word-of-mouth and email marketing, in the midst of retail's slowest season. Plans for a Grand Opening are made; March 13-16, include a ribbon cutting ceremony with the Greater Brookfield Chamber of Commerce and the City's Mayor.



Rendall now employs seven part time employees to help free his time to do more networking and marketing in the community to build the business. His chosen location is fortunate to have plenty of foot traffic and exposure. Rendall now looks to hire a full time manager to oversee the store's employees and operations. If all goes well, he is also open to starting an additional metro Milwaukee location. As a raving fan of the SBDC, Rendall has plenty of great experiences and feedback to share. The SBDC delights in his success!