

## When Preparation Meets Opportunity

### A Profile of Lon Fox, MBA 1996



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Lon Fox was not surprised when he heard that *U.S. News and World Report* had ranked Ball State's entrepreneurship program fourth in the nation. He was not surprised because, as an MBA student, he had been through the program himself and, as an entrepreneur, he knew how the program benefited its graduates.

Lon owns and manages a Muncie-area Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE), fulfilling a dream that began nearly 8 years ago while he managed a \$10 million dollar market for a Florida-based transportation company. He credits his experience at the company with helping him develop his "sea legs," but the problems which can plague any large company—those of communication, accountability, and rigid procedures—led him to consider starting his own small business.

When he moved with his family back to east central Indiana, Lon used the new start here to make the first step toward starting his business. Having grown up in the area, he knew that studying at Ball State was a valuable opportunity. He enrolled in the MBA program wanting to "retool" himself for the changing business environment. He hoped that his education would help to control better some of the risks that the small business owner faced.

Lon drove into campus next to an empty child restraint seat, and when he sat down in his classes, he was older than most of those around him. As he realized that his age was an asset, any possible anxiety soon dissolved. He was better able to understand the concepts of his courses because he was able to apply those concepts to a wide range of experiences. And, even though he was often up nights with his child, he was still able to become an engaged student and an informal mentor for others.

Lon speaks with a passion about the entrepreneurship courses he took, tracing his passion back to the contagious passion of "Dr. K", as he still calls Dr. Kuratko. One of Dr. K's quotes, "success is when preparation meets opportunity," helps to explain Lon's success. Lon prepared himself by maintaining a focus on his own

goals throughout his coursework and by keeping a positive attitude. Lon says, "The only thing people can control is their attitude." The opportunity came through Dr. K's major applied research project, which Lon used to synthesize the research he had already done into a functional business plan he could use once he graduated.

Lon used that business plan to apply for the loan which eventually financed the opening of his MBE. The loan officers were impressed by his preparation, particularly the detail and thoroughness of his business plan. They needed only an hour to decide that they wanted to fund his business. Three years later, the projections of his business plan were within 5% of what actually happened. In fact, Lon exceeded those projections.

Now, Lon's MBE is in the top 10 for sales of the Central Indiana MBEs, despite the fact that his is only three years old. His success is recognized by his peers, who have elected him president of a regional advertising co-op, and by potential franchisers, who seek his advice before taking the plunge. Despite the many commitments that successful businesses require of their owners, Lon still finds time to commit to a local program which introduces high school students to entrepreneurship.

Lon remembers an interesting story that illustrates the prominence of the entrepreneurship program. Before opening his business, Lon attended a three-week orientation at MBE headquarters in San Diego. There he was joined by people across the U.S. who were also preparing to start their own businesses. In one of the first meetings, the members of the group one-by-one introduced themselves and gave their background. When Lon explained that he was a graduate of an entrepreneurship program at Ball State, the leader of the session, a session thousands of miles from Muncie, stopped and with a subtle hint of admiration asked, "Isn't that Kuratko's program?"

No, Lon is not surprised by the ranking of Ball State's entrepreneurship program.

—Ralph Rife, Graduate Assistant