

Serving Seniors

Business planning brings first personal care homes to underserved community

By Jennifer Giarratano

Cotton Grove Estate owner and CEO Anna Pittard never thought that in her 20s she'd own Jesup's first luxury personal care home. The seed was planted, though, when she moved to the West Coast, pursued a nursing degree and took a job in an adult foster home — Oregon's equivalent to a personal care home — to gain patient skills.

The home was beautifully decorated, and residents received top care.

"I thought, wow, this is what Jesup needs," says Pittard. "I had three older family members in nursing homes and hated visiting them because of the stereotypical nursing home environment. Yet here I was, living in Oregon and treating their seniors like royalty."

By March 2014, after learning as much as she could from the family who owned and ran the Oregon home, Pittard returned to Jesup and convinced her extended family to let her care for her grandmother and great aunt in her grandparents' home. She hired caregivers to provide supplemental care. When people in the community saw what she was doing, many would ask if other seniors in their care could move in.

Pittard bought a house later that year and expanded care to other family members. By 2017, she had three additional staff, six residents, a waiting list and a dream: five personal care homes in a community setting.

"I called the bank and asked for a bigger loan, she says. "But my vision was all in my head, not in a business plan. My banker said, 'There's a guy in Brunswick who works for the University of Georgia, and I think he can help you.'"

At his urging, she found David Lewis, area director of the UGA Small Business Development Center in Brunswick, and scheduled a meeting.

Together, Pittard and Lewis looked at her numbers and developed a narrative business plan and projections modeling the cash flow she'd receive on a 60-acre property she had found. Pittard then took this information to the bank.

"This loan officer looked at my plan and asked if David Lewis had helped me," she says. "He said he could tell he did because everything in it was solid and complete." She received the \$1.3 million loan.

Pittard bought the property, sold its front parcels and transformed two of its five cabins into luxurious, six-bedroom homes. In February 2019, Cotton Grove Estate passed its first

Anna Pittard

Cotton Grove Estate



Photo: Cotton Grove Estate

Anna Pittard, left, with Renee Bolin.

licensing state inspection. And yes, its 25 employees treat the residents like royalty, Pittard says.

Pittard's revenue has quadrupled from 2014 and is now in the six figures. Within six years, she expects all homes on the property to be renovated and serving 30 residents.

"Anna truly cares about her residents," says Lewis. "When we have business discussions, she thinks about what's good for the residents first, numbers second. She's learning there's a place where everyone can win — the residents and her business. And she's going after a market that will only expand as the population ages."