

## Entrepreneurs Reflect on Success and Share Advice

A month shy of his 25th birthday, Krish Patel ('08), was already the owner and director of operations for 14 Verizon Wireless retail outlets across the Upstate and South Carolina. While a business administration major in the Johnson College of Business and Economics, this entrepreneur was formulating his business plan for the company he went on to form in 2008 called Wireless Communications which now has 75 employees. Patel came back to the classroom to share his remarkable entrepreneurial story to Instructor Jeff Smith's 300-level business class called Topics in Metropolitan Studies: Entrepreneurism.

Patel was one of 19 entrepreneurs, drawn from the restaurant, microbrewery, non-profit, advertising, coal brokerage, community banking, investment advising, venture capital, textile, data analysis, storage, and medical fields, to share their stories. Patty Bock and Amanda Mathis, with the City of Spartanburg Economic Development Department, also joined the class to discuss opportunities for public/private partnerships, available sources of public funding, and tax incentives for job creation.

"Our goal is to prepare students for entrepreneurial endeavors if they chose that path in life. The willingness of these successful individuals from our Upstate community to join us in the classroom to expose our students to examples of real success is invaluable to us in completing this goal," says Smith. He adds that it was beneficial for students to see that entrepreneurs go into business for a variety of reasons, at different times in their lives and with different expectations, goals and measures of success.

In addition to sharing the particulars of growing a business within their specific industry, many speakers discussed how legislation, regulations, politics and current events affected their business, including opportunities that can be found during a recession. Speakers stressed the importance of goal setting, relationship building, reputation, credibility and differentiation from the competition. Several shared how their faith influenced their business and their perspective on success. Additionally, selected high school students from Dorman, Spartanburg Day School, Spartanburg Christian Academy and Spartanburg High were invited to attend several of the presentations.

Courses in entrepreneurship are now offered by more than 1,200 American universities, according to a recent analysis by the New York Times. The Johnson College course is a 300 level course for junior and senior business majors. Smith says that even if his students do not continue on to start their own businesses, the knowledge they gain from an entrepreneur can be applicable in any corporate business setting.

Visit [uscupstate.edu/johnsoncollege](http://uscupstate.edu/johnsoncollege) to see more photos and details of each speaker's presentation.



*Can you hear me now? Students listened intently to 2008 graduate **Krish Patel** (right), 25, who in just a few short years went from customer service representative, to top-earning sales representative, to corporate manager, and now to owner and director of operations for 14 Verizon Wireless retail outlets across the Upstate and South Carolina. His company, Wireless Communications, employs 75 people. He is pictured here with instructor Jeff Smith.*

## Speaker's Roster

**John Bauknight** and **Nick Wildrick**  
Co-owners, Shred First, RJ Rockers and Longleaf Development

**Dr. Mary Joan Black**  
Partner, Orthopedic Associates, PA

**Hal Blackwell**  
Investment Advisor, HE Blackwell Advisors

**Steve Caldwell**  
Founder of Data Ventures, Inc., Associate Professor of Management

**Justin Converse**  
President, Converse and Company

**Jimmy Gibbs**  
President and CEO, Gibbs International, Inc.

**Steve Harvey ('80)**  
Owner, Roebuck Advertising

**Hamp Lindsey**  
Owner, Wade's Restaurant

**Amanda Mathis** and **Patty Bock**  
City of Spartanburg Economic Development

**Jayne McQueen**  
President and CEO, Mobile Meals

**David Miller ('90)**  
Former President and Founder of Community South Bank, Consultant with Unique Financial Solutions

**Krish Patel ('08)**  
Owner, Wireless Communications

**Carter Ridgeway ('08)**  
Owner, II Samuels Restaurant

**Benjamin Wall** and **Mark Blackman**  
Principals, WJ Partners, LLC

**Billy Webster**  
Co-founder, Advance America, Cash Advance Centers, Inc.

**Joe Wells** and **David Zabriskie**,  
Developers, Rome Nightclub

**Mike Wood ('77)**  
President and CEO, American Storage



Orthopedic surgeon **Dr. Mary Joan Black** owns her practice together with seven partners. Dr. Black discussed the business side of a health care practice, including how insurance reimbursements work, Medicare and Medicaid, rising costs of health care, and fraud within the system. She also discussed how the recently-passed health care bill will affect the business of health care delivery.



**David Miller** ('90) explained how the economic crisis has affected local and community banks differently than Wall Street banks. He is the founder and former president of Community South Bank. He is now a consultant with Unique Financial Solutions.



**Nick Wildrick** and **John Bauknight** have started a number of successful ventures together, starting with Shred First. They now own RJ Rockers Brewing Company, a microbrewery with an annual capacity of over 25,000 barrels. Their business motto is CRISP: culture, reputation, integrity, service, passion and persistence.



Following in his father's footsteps, **Justin Converse** owns and manages Converse and Company, a full service coal brokerage serving a variety of industrial and energy-producing facilities throughout the Southeast.



Jimmy Gibbs started his textile equipment business 37 years ago and very quickly realized significant success. This self made businessman has since expanded his company, Gibbs International, into real estate, coal energy, HFO, solar power, power plants and natural gas in the Middle East, China, Africa, Kenya, India and Germany. Advice he gave to students was to "reinvent yourself every three to five years because someone is always trying to catch up to you."



Originally in the newspaper business, USC Upstate alum **Steve Harvey** ('80) was called upon to help his mother run the family business, Roebuck Advertising, after his father passed away. He liked it so much, he eventually took over ownership. Harvey had several words of wisdom to share with students including to always be networking no matter where you are, to always have your "elevator speech" ready, and to use marketing and advertising to stand out from your competition. In addition to Roebuck Advertising, Harvey owns a language translation business, a real estate investment business, and a Nationwide Insurance office.



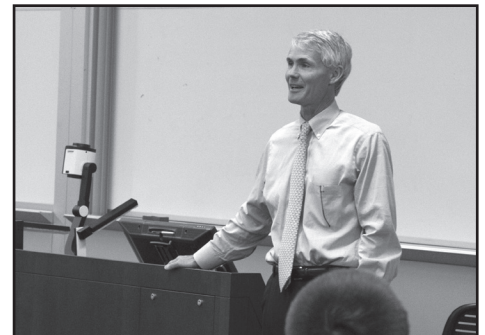
Mobile Meals, a non-profit organization that serves 2,000 meals daily to the homebound and bedridden in the Spartanburg area, didn't happen by accident. It was a faith-based calling, says founder and director **Jayne McQueen**. With a background as a mother and teacher, McQueen had to learn the steps to start and operate a non-profit, but she relied on God and a dedicated group of volunteers and donors to drive the agency's success. McQueen says her definition of success is not based on money, but on the spiritual reward she gets from doing a job that makes her happy.



Students were very curious and excited about the new nightclub taking shape on Morgan Square in downtown Spartanburg called Rome. In their pre-opening tour, they met the principals of the club, President **Joe Wells** and Events Planner **David Zabriskie**, who shared their plans for the venue as they toured the extensively renovated building. Among the first to preview the club, the students were interested to learn about and observe a new business venture before its launch. Photo: GoUpstate.com.



Starting, growing and maintaining a successful restaurant was the topic of Hamp Lindsey and Carter Ridgeway's discussion. As owner of Wade's, Lindsey says he focuses his business on the one thing that separates, or positions, a business from all others. In his case he positions Wade's around vegetables. As the owner of II Samuels, Johnson College alum Carter Ridgeway formulated the business plan for the restaurant in instructor Jeff Smith's New Business Enterprise class.



"You must understand the politics of the industry you're getting into," says **Billy Webster**, co-founder of Advance America. Webster detailed how lobbyists and the political conditions of the past few years (credit crisis, debt, housing bubble) have affected the financial services industry. Referring to the 1,500 page Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2009 which affected hedge funds and mortgage backed securities, he said that it "was the single most important piece of legislation passed since the Great Depression, and nobody read it in its entirety."

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