

## 2025 Entrepreneur of the Year

### **Junque in the Trunk**

These two entrepreneurs have introduced a unique shopping experience that has rapidly become a significant economic driver for the region. After identifying the potential in a previously neglected, large-scale commercial space, they transformed it into a thriving marketplace featuring over 70+ vendors. In less than a year, their venture has gained a massive following, drawing shoppers from across the state and the country, providing a much-needed boost to the local economy.

Their impact extends far beyond retail. They have fostered a spirit of collaboration by partnering with other local businesses to integrate food services into their facility and providing dedicated space for emerging entrepreneurs to sell their products. They are the home of midnight shopping, bin sales, and more. This forward-thinking approach has created a vibrant community hub that continues to grow, with plans already underway to expand their physical square footage to accommodate a significant waiting list of participants. In March, they will expand to include a vintage and antique furniture gallery.

Community involvement is a cornerstone of their business model. They have demonstrated their support for local infrastructure by providing meals for highway construction workers and are actively planning fundraisers for agencies dedicated to domestic violence prevention and other non-profits in Henry County. Additionally, they host educational classes open to the public, further cementing their role as a resource for residents.

Through their infectious enthusiasm and strategic vision, these leaders have ignited a sense of fun and possibility in the local market. Their commitment to high-impact partnerships and nonprofit support suggests a future of continued expansion and deep-rooted service to the area.

### **Blue River Taphouse**

This local taphouse and brewery serves as a vital destination business that anchors the downtown district. By providing a high-quality, intentional experience previously only available in larger cities, it keeps discretionary spending within the county and draws visitors from the surrounding region. This influx of traffic creates a "halo effect" that supports neighboring shops and restaurants, strengthening the entire local ecosystem.

The owners are the definition of hands-on entrepreneurs. Their commitment to excellence is evident in their menu, which features ingredients grown in their own gardens and products sourced from regional makers. This strategy ensures that dollars continue to circulate locally rather than being sent to outside corporations.

Beyond commerce, the establishment serves as a community "living room." By hosting trivia nights, private dinners, and special events, the owners have created a consistent reason for residents to gather downtown. They further integrate community into their business by using the walls as a gallery for local artists and commissioning locally made items for their membership programs. This intersection of art, craft, and hospitality has helped raise the standard for what residents expect from local businesses.

The success of this venture is built on authenticity and grit. Despite personal and professional challenges, the owners have remained a consistent, welcoming presence. Their business is not just a place to consume a product; it is a catalyst for downtown momentum and a model of how

entrepreneurship can be used to lift an entire community. Through their tireless work and innovative spirit, they have created a lasting cultural and economic asset for the region.

### **Little Sprouts Play Studio/The Sweet Shop**

This play studio and its owners have rapidly become a cornerstone of the local community by addressing the specific need for family-oriented connection. Since its inception in early 2025, the business has successfully cultivated a "village" atmosphere where families can gather, build relationships, and find mutual support. This mission-driven approach has translated into strong word-of-mouth growth and a loyal membership base that keeps foot traffic and discretionary spending within the county.

The economic impact of the studio extends beyond its own walls through intentional local partnerships. By collaborating with regional vendors, the business ensures that capital continues to circulate locally. The owners recently deepened their commitment to the area's future by acquiring a long-standing local confectionery shop, a move aimed at preserving and revitalizing cherished community spaces. This strategic investment demonstrates a long-term dedication to strengthening the local business ecosystem while maintaining gathering places that hold historical and social value for residents.

Community service is integrated into the studio's daily operations. The business actively supports local nonprofits, schools, and family-focused organizations through the donation of play passes and the sponsorship of civic events. By offering their facility for community fundraisers and gatherings, the owners provide a physical space for activities that strengthen social bonds.

Ultimately, this venture serves as a model for how modern entrepreneurship can meet a specific social need while driving economic vitality. Through a combination of in-kind contributions, local sponsorships, and the preservation of community landmarks, the owners are playing a pivotal role in rebuilding the supportive infrastructure that local families deserve.