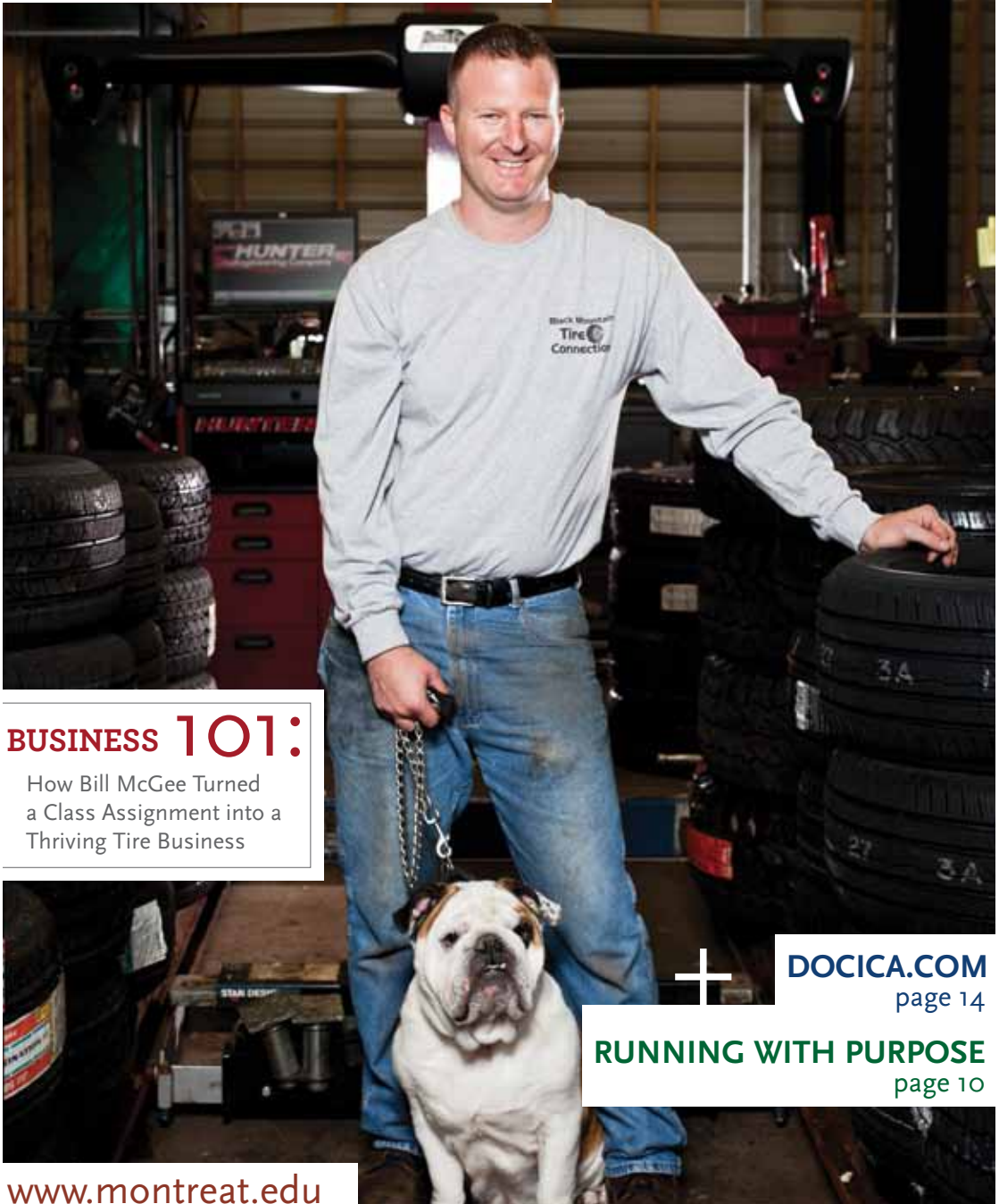


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THE MONTREAT COLLEGE MAGAZINE



BUSINESS 101:

How Bill McGehee Turned a Class Assignment into a Thriving Tire Business



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Business 101:

How Bill McGee Turned a Class Assignment into a Thriving Tire Business





It's a Thursday morning in September, and I sit in the small waiting room of Black Mountain Tire Connection. As I check email on my smartphone and wait for my new tires to be installed, I note the high level of activity. Customers sit in every available chair, the phone rings constantly, and the storm door that leads out into the parking lot creaks open and slaps close every minute or so.

Moving in between the garage and the office, owner Bill McGee is stopped by an older gentleman in work clothes. "I can't thank you enough. I'll never go anywhere else for tires," I overhear him say. They shake hands and he departs. While I wait, several other people stop Bill to say "thank you" and promise not only their future business, but their referrals.

Bill runs his shop with integrity, honesty, and treats each customer equally. Customers who spend \$200 in a year and customers who spend \$20,000 get the same attention and respect. Black Mountain Tire Connection is thriving, and it all started twelve years ago in a classroom at Montreat College.

Bill is a Black Mountain local who chose Montreat, in part, so he could play college baseball. He majored in business with a

marketing concentration with no clear idea of what he hoped to do after he graduated. In 2000, in a business class taught by Professor Dave Walters, a semester-long project worth 30% of the final grade was given. The assignment: to create a business plan for a small, medium, or large market. At the time, McGee was working part-time for a tire company, so he created a plan for a small-market business tire store and set it in downtown Black Mountain.

“The assignment: to create a business plan for a small, medium, or large market.”

Bill remembers Dave Walters asking him to stay after class one afternoon. "I thought I'd done something wrong," McGee admits. Walters encouraged Bill to pursue his business idea, and offered him help if he decided to move forward.

Dave Walters, now the director of development at Montreat College, reflects on his former

student's plan: "It was well thought out, well-researched, and well-written. More importantly, he wrote it with a sense of ownership from the beginning, [like it] was his project, not just a course project." Bill appreciated Walters' encouragement but didn't seriously consider acting on the plan until several months after he graduated.

In the late fall of 2001 Bill had graduation behind him and a few job offers on the table. Every offer required him to move, and Bill was determined to stay in his hometown. His dad threw out an idea: "While you're looking, why don't you open up a tire store in Black Mountain and just sell a few tires, see how it goes?"

A few days later Bill's father took him to the bank. Bill thought his dad was going to withdraw money from his personal account to help him start the business. "But my dad looked at the girl across the aisle and said, 'My son needs a loan.' I argued with him – 'No, I don't need a loan. I need you to give me some money.' And he said no!"

Bill laughs as he remembers the \$5,000 loan he ended up taking out that day, and speaks with amazement that 11 years later Black Mountain Tire Connection is a million dollar business.

Bill openly admits that some days he wishes he could walk away from the challenges and strains of owning a business.

Hard work, government taxes, and a fast paced environment offer daily difficulties. But he enjoys the people, he's found that "it's seldom about the cost and the price – it's more about relationship. I think I've been very successful just being good to people."



Bill McGee '01 serves dozens of customers on a typical day at Black Mountain Tire Connection.

My tires are on, and Bill calls me up to the counter. He answers my questions with a relaxed attitude and I thank him for being so helpful on the phone when I couldn't even remember the model year of my car. "Drive safe," Bill says as he hands me my receipt. "I will, and I'll be back," I respond. "Yes, mam," Bill replies as he turns to answer the ringing telephone. ■