

Turning pens into profit

Glenville 11-year-old's handiwork goes from hobby to personal business



Anna Williams, an 11-year-old of Glenville, turns wood on a lathe to finely carve out one of her handmade pens. Williams' handmade pen hobby ended up turning into a profitable business. Photo by [John Purcell](#).

GLENVILLE — Parents: the next time your kids want to take up a new hobby, you may be able to think of it as a business proposal.

That's what happened to the Williams family, at least. Anna Williams was 8 years old when she decided the craft of pen making was something she wanted to explore. Her father, Michael, had shown her short video clip online about a teenage boy who was making pens and then selling the handmade writing tools.

"I only showed her 'cause I thought it was interesting and he was a young kid ... not because I was expecting her to do it," Michael Williams said.

Now 11, Anna Williams has been making hand-turned pens for a year-and-a-half, using a lathe to turn wood and tools to carve out the design. Although her interest hasn't waned, it took some time to convince her parents to purchase a lathe and the needed supplies.

"I wanted to do it, so I kind of begged my dad for hours and hours and he still refused," she said.

Two years of persistence paid off, because once her father said “maybe” she knew she had persevered after being shot down for so long.

Her father bought her a lathe for around \$130 and before he knew it she was asking for more pen kits. Originally, she had no intention to start her own business, but the door was opened after she was offered money for a pen.



Anna Williams

Michael Williams said he set up a website, pensink.com, for his daughter to share her hobby with family and friends. It was also a way for people to purchase a pen by cash or check. Then the website attracted a customer from across the globe.

“Her order from Australia is when we realized it feels like we have a little business here,” he said. “It really kind of went from a hobby and moved into a business.”

From there, Pens Ink became a reality and now receives orders from all over the world, including from Russia and India. Anna Williams has taught herself along the way and learned the craft through trial and error.

“I like everything about owning a business,” she said.

She is also the youngest member of The Chamber of Southern Saratoga County, joining in February after her business became profitable.

She enjoys going to mixers the Chamber hosts, although at first she was a little reluctant to meet with professionals who were much older and taller than her.

“I am a kid and I am kind of looking up to them, literally,” she said. “I like going to mixers and meeting new people.”

Even though she tries to be as professional as fellow Chamber members, she said some-times she just “doesn’t want to be” and wants to be a kid, but she keeps her composure.

Being a business owner at such a young age does have its challenges.

“It is hard to juggle everything,” she said. “It is kind of cool and weird and a little scary at times.”

She is graduating from the fifth grade at Glenclyff Elementary School this year and balancing school, friends, Pens Ink and other hobbies and interest isn’t the easiest task. The experience she is gaining is worth the effort to her, though.

“It is definitely worth having a business because of the experience,” she said.

She said most of her friends are “very supportive,” but sometimes they don’t adjust to it as easily.

“Even your best friends are sometimes going to be intimidated by what you do,” she said.

All of her profits have mostly gone towards buying more inventory, but Williams is eyeing an iPad or a similar device to help her stay organized and take better pictures.

