

CompuRecycling: Training today, tomorrow's workforce

By Patrick Ervin

There has to be some sense of satisfaction that accompanies looking in life's rearview mirror and seeing milestones reached, lives positively impacted, and differences made in one's community. Better yet, along with these memories and accomplishments, the promise of new adventures lies ahead.

Small business owner Gene Finley continues to leave an indelible mark in local workforce training, consultation, mentoring and youth development.

More than 26 years ago, he and his wife, Eva, were looking to return to their native Delta area after working in Chicago for 15 years. His first business venture was the product of data collection, planning, and relationship development.

"CompuSystems is a for-profit technology company that provides repair services and training for computers, mobile devices and iPads," Finley explained. "We are also a vendor of office supplies with customers worldwide thanks to our online catalogue."

Starting such a company nearly three decades ago was somewhat of a novelty. In the late 1990s, the proliferation of technology was increasing, but not at a pace that could be foreseen by today's standards.

In order to provide evidence and support for a burgeoning industry, the Finleys intricately did their homework before deciding to jump into the small



Gene Finley

business arena.

"We did a lot of strategic planning," Finley explained. "We flew to Mississippi three times and met with all of the leaders and people in various industries before we decided to come back home."

About halfway through the existence of CompuSystems, Finley and his board of directors established CompuRecycling Center, a nonprofit spin-off of CompuSystems. However, the official work of this organization did not begin until Finley's resignation from the for-profit in 2019.

"The purpose of CompuRecycling Center is for education and training," he explained. "We have offices in Greenville and Clarksdale and serve more than 650 Delta businesses. We have partnerships with area banks whose employees and administrators serve as speakers and presenters. Through seminars, webinars and in-person events, we teach businesses and non-profits how to procure contracts and attain grant funding through the Mississippi Development Authority and the Small Business Administration. We cover a ten-county area and serve as a certified bridge organization between state, local and federal agencies and Delta-based businesses."

Another very popular offering that comes via CompuRecycling Center's expertise is medical training. Modern day healthcare is wrought with data ranging from patient demographic information to biostatistics.

"We have a partnership with a local hospital to provide training in healthcare information management for their staff," he explained. "We also have a background in workforce training regarding the industrial base with companies such as Mars, USG and formerly Nicholson Saw."

Compu Recycling Center also invests time and

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effort into securing the future workforce of the Mississippi Delta. In the coming weeks, Finley and his staff will be soliciting the support of the community for spurring the innovation, curiosity, and skill building of local school-aged children.

"We conduct what's called a Medical Ascension Pipeline Education Program for children aspiring towards medical careers," Finley said. "This was my wife's idea after she had a conversation with one of our children who was interested in the medical profession. She thought that it would be to young people's advantage if they had exposure to medical technology, medical terminology and healthcare professionals' expertise before they decide to go into a career field."

"We also have a Digital Marketing and Media Program," he expounded. "This is a summer session where we teach kids how to repair computer components and printer ink cartridges and recycle old computers." Both the recycling program and the medical program are our summer camps."

Both officially and unofficially, those who have been under the training of Finley and his staff over the years have received not only technical assistance and hard skills associated with employment, but also life skills and

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Gene Finley CompuRecycling Center owner

suggestions of wisdom along the way. "I'm still a strong proponent of workforce training," Finley said. "There are great opportunities and sustainable careers to be had in fields such as pharmacy technician, medical transcriptionist and others. These are occupations that are in-demand and require a shorter amount of time and money to complete."

"If the career that you're exploring involves pure science or pure math, I suggest that you look at a four-year university with a high graduation rate in that particular major. Study after study has shown that a four-year college degree is the most proven way to attain

gainful employment at pay above a living wage, but it's not the only way."

There are those who desire to walk the same path Finley and his family has walked by owning a business as a primary livelihood and means of achieving the needs of daily living. He has advice for this group as well. "I was just talking about this very thing to a group of three people who were looking to start their own businesses," he said. "They were listening intently and I think I gave them about a 15-minute answer. But the short version is that when you own your own business, the day starts when you get up in the morn-

ing. And you are going to typically put in a 12-to-14-hour day in the beginning. And life continues to happen. We still had to find time to invest in our kids and activities such as sports. You must decide early in the process if you're up to the task."

Thankfully, Finley has answered the Bell and has his brand firmly rooted in the Delta with several more good years of coaching, mentoring and building the Delta's workforce and business base of the future. This is something that gives him a great sense of accomplishment. "We started out with every intention of being the very best technology corporation in the Delta," he said. "It's been a great experience for us because we've never missed a payroll, raised our children in our efforts, helped several individuals and businesses and hired several Deltans in the process. I'm very proud of this."

What's the next step?

"I have no timetable set aside for retirement, but my wife might have one in her mind for me," Finley laughed. "I still enjoy what I do and I love working with the upcoming workforce because there is so much promise and passion within this group. And the need is still great in our area for the services that we provide."



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