

Albany Man In The Swim Of Things With New Business

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H.J. Chandler's pool service business has exceeded his expectations, according to Chandler. His financial services business failed in Atlanta during the economic downturn of 2007.

ALBANY -- For 15 years, H.J. Chandler enjoyed the good life, running his own Atlanta-based financial services company. Then came tougher times for many in the industry, and Chandler was no exception. It was 2007 when things went seriously sour, Chandler said.

He tried to save the business he'd had so long, drawing from savings and moonlighting as an apartment painter. At various times, he sold repossessed vehicles and commercial equipment. Nothing served as more than stopgap measures, and Chandler was picking up speed in the wrong direction.

"Financial services was my real thing," the businessman said. "I hoped if I could keep it going, then things would get better."

According to Chandler, he and his wife, Lauren, came to realize that something had to be done. They began investigating small businesses, both franchise and independent. Chandler had considered the "Dumpster," or refuse-hauling business, and thought it might do OK for them.

"I've associated with some people in that business from time to time, and they've done all right for themselves. In the end, it just didn't feel right," he said.

In the meantime, the couple decided that whatever they ended up doing would be done in Albany. Lauren Chandler had grown up here and had attended Deerfield Windsor School. They had a 2-year old daughter and wanted to raise her in a more rural atmosphere.

"I liked Atlanta all right," Chandler said, "but it takes so long to go anywhere or do anything. I'm an outdoorsman, and there's just not enough opportunity for that."

At one point, Chandler considered a battery franchise, he said. Ultimately, he rejected the idea because the investment was more than he was willing to risk for the potential return.

As luck would have it, one of Lauren Chandler's friends had grown up with Stewart Vernon, founder of America's Swimming Pool Company, or ASP. The friend mentioned the possibility of a franchise to H.J. Chandler, and he began to investigate.

Eventually, the couple came to feel the cost was in line with the risk and decided to dive into the pool maintenance and repair business. After several weeks of training, Chandler's ASP franchise opened in March.

"The response was very good," he said. "I want to do better, of course, but I have high goals, and it's a great start."

According to Chandler, ASP pool services include maintenance, repair, replacement and installation of parts, and renovation. ASP doesn't build pools, however.

Although it was an option open to him within the franchise, Chandler decided to conduct business without a physical storefront. Instead, his three uniformed employees move from pool to pool in pickup trucks.