

Jason Barnes  
Owner – All Time Toys

My name is Jason Barnes, I am the owner of All Time Toys that was located in Ellicott City MD until after the May 2018 Flash Flood. I am now located in Eldersburg MD. I was employed by the company in 2005, worked my way up to become the operations manager and then, on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, I bought the company from the previous owners. Only two months before the July 30th 2016 in Ellicott City. The 2016 flood completely devastated my business...a complete system failure across the board. I lost about 75% of the total company including most of my inventory and the back-end systems needed to support the business. Several days later, I was sitting in the Disaster Assistance Center completely drained. I was emotionally and physically beaten and looking for answers about what to do next. I approached the Maryland SBDC help desk and met with its consultants, Craig Panos and Garrett Glover. The relief and hope I got from that talk with Garrett and Craig was miraculous! From that point forward, with their continued support and knowledge and resources, I was able to rebuild my business and restore my company.

I met with Garrett a few days after that fateful day in August and together we came up with our first plan for recovery, the first of many ongoing strategic plans. The priority was to start selling product and generate revenue. We started by selling what merchandise was left online and did everything else that was needed to get the brick-and-mortar back up and running, from grants to displays to staffing and Jan. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017, we reopened in record time.

What a massive success the reopening was, with some of the highest sales the company had ever seen. We were looking at a sales growth of over 100%, year over year with in the first few months alone. From that point forward, I met with Garrett on a weekly basis on a recovery plan. Together we worked on everything from the basics of merchandising to financing to advance business tool/systems, like diagnostic P&L formats for tracking sales and analyzing expenses, We created a differentiating brand ID, enhanced customer experience tactics, human resource and employee development procedures. We also created a unique company culture where we could expand the company and allow it to keep growing. And so we did! By the winter of 2018, we started working on and were succeeding with plans to launch a second location within the year.

Then, disaster struck again! May 2018 brought in another flash flooding of Main Street. This second flood was even more devastating than the 2016 flood. But, because of the work and lessons learned from the previous flood, we had the skills, systems, internal resources and confidence to rebound smartly and quickly. Within a month, working continuously with the SBDC, we were selling online again and, within five months, were able to reopen again...but this time with a bigger and more mature operation.

At this point our new store has been open for eight months and again we are still setting new sales records, greater customer satisfaction, increased referrals and repeat business and, in the process, we retained and created jobs. And, yes, we are even now back on track scouting for a second location. All good news and looking back only to reflect on how far we've come.

In August of 2016, I was a new, clueless business owner facing one of the greatest disasters a business can face. I knew when I bought the company, I was able to make money selling toys but knew nothing about being a business owner. All I knew is what I didn't know, which was a lot. I knew I had a passion for toys, games & collectibles but zero about running a business. But working continuously with the Maryland SBDC, even after a few weeks, I was able to start learning how to run a business.

The SBDC did more than just help me find financing and put things back together to recover. They taught me how to analyze and improve every aspect of my business so that I didn't just survive but, more importantly, I could thrive moving forward. The lessons I have learned are too many to count and too many to say in any sort of time frame that wouldn't take hours. You must understand that the lessons and resources Garrett and Craig provide are tailored to the individual needs of each business. What I needed and learned might not fit what others needed and that is what makes them so special. This is what allowed them to not just help me but Ellicott City in whole. Because of the individualized action plans and

one-on-one meetings, they were able to find out what my business is, what my business needs, what I wanted my business to be and how best to move forward in my disaster recovery effort.

The greatest gift that the Maryland SBDC has given me is a true passion for business which now outweighs my love of toys, games & collectible. This love of business has truly driven me after multiple disasters, and I am consoled knowing that the SBDC will always be there to help with recovery and growth moving forward. I have talked about that fateful day in August 2016 when I first started working with the SBDC. But that's not the one day that stands out most in my mind. The one most memorable day came the morning after the devastating May 2018 flood, my store Manager and I were going to pick up our new ID's for access to survey what was left of our business on Main Street. When we pulled up, we saw two familiar faces. Both Garrett and Craig were standing there, and I knew from this point on they were in it with us for the long haul ... and so they have been. To say my business wouldn't be standing today without the Maryland SBDC is an understatement. With their help I am no longer just surviving disaster.... I am looking to a brighter future where long-term success is possible.