

*Our story about David Jacobson is the first in a series of entrepreneur stories from Pottawattamie County Iowa and the HomeTown Competitiveness Initiative.*

## David Jacobson

### An American Entrepreneur

05.01.13

#### About David

David Jacobson was born in Council Bluffs, Iowa. He has spent his life in the Heartland of America, serving the United States in the military, working as an over the road trucker and then operating a courier service in the Council Bluffs/Omaha area. David also goes by Jake, and his partner in life is his wife, Roxanne. He is a family man with children and now grandchildren.



Like so many entrepreneurs, David's current venture has its roots in the early stages of his life. As a teen, David worked in the meat department of a small grocery store. He became interested in meats and particularly cooked meats. Like so many entrepreneurs, the lines between business and life are blurred with David. As you will see in this story, he loves both life and his new work with Papa Jake's BBQ.

#### Why Start a Business?

When we interviewed David, we asked a question we have asked thousands of entrepreneurs, "Why are you doing this?" That question started a fun conversation as David reflected on his motivations for starting Papa Jake's BBQ. The answer is rooted in both a fear and a passion to do something David really loves. First, let's share the fear factor. David has been around life's trials more than a few times. He has grown in wisdom created by life's lessons. When David got off the road as a trucker, he started a courier business in Western Iowa. This was a great deal for David, but he could see the writing on the wall. Bank consolidation and automation were reducing the number of stops and volume of traffic. Intuitively, he knew that this business's life was shortening and that he "needed something to do."

As the courier business was winding down, David's daughters bought him a new grill and smoker. This is where David reconnected with his interest in cooked meats. Like other entrepreneurs, David was motivated by something personal. Many of the smoked meats he ate gave him heartburn, and so he was motivated to create meats that he liked and could eat without consequences. The beginnings of Papa Jake's BBQ were now taking shape and a new business in rural Pottawattamie County was born.

### Helping Hands

David has been amazed at how helpful folks have been with his new business. Now, he is open to help and that makes a difference. So many folks have supported David, and we can only share a few.

Top on David's support list is friend and advisor Lori Holste with the Western Iowa Development Association or WIDA. David shares that Lori took time to listen to his dreams and connect him to so many resources.

Lori introduced David to John Adams, a business coach with the Business Success Program supported by WIDA, Iowa Western Community College, Pottawattamie County HomeTown Competitiveness Initiative and the Iowa West Foundation. John helps folks like David sort through issues and build better businesses.

Government regulators are often seen as bad guys, but David did not wait for the Iowa Food Inspectors to show up. He called them. He shares that they were great and so helpful. He listens and follows advice. He is committed to safe and healthy food, and he lets folks know that working with regulators has saved him time, money and grief.

There are so many other supporters including his suppliers, the Harlan REC and its help with a small business loan, the City of Avoco that has worked with him on his building and provided him with a business friendly attitude.

Bottom line, this area wants to foster business and support people like David who are contributing to economic development.

### Papa Jake's BBQ

The gift from his daughters of a grill and a smoker evolved into the purchase of a commercial van. Then, his relationships with folks in the area helped David secure meats (Avoca Goods), welding machinery (Guyers Machine Shop), a trailer supplier (Lyle Bently BFSCo.) and helped to convert a downtown building in Avoca into a preparation area – and someday a town café. Today,



David's primary business gig is his food truck and stops in small towns, celebrations like Hancock's Old Settler's Day, and catering gigs for weddings, receptions, retirements, graduations and the like.

David loves people, and after years of trucking and courier work, he values the interplay with customers. When you talk with David, you can feel that he enjoys being with people. He takes great pleasure in the joy he brings to town events with good food and neighbors spending time chatting. David feels he is making a contribution to the quality of small town life with his business. For David, being in business is more than making money, although making a living is important. Despite being dog tired some days, this is not really work for David. It is a way of life that makes him happy while earning him a living.

What started as a part-time and sideline business is growing. It is becoming David's full-time work, and it is beginning to create work opportunities for others including members of his family. The food truck is going to more gigs and is becoming busy more days of the year. The plans for a downtown café are taking shape and could become reality in the current year. Community jobs and economic activity are resulting from what started out as his teenage interest in meats and a gift from his daughters.

## Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

### Keys to Success

We asked David what were the keys to his success and the answer was clear and compelling. David is motivated, and, more importantly, he is open to learning. This positive attitude of seeking and accepting help is central to David's success and happiness. David is the first one to share that his success is rooted in help from "so many different people." David is at the core of his success and yes he feels he would have gotten somewhere on his own, but he freely admits he has gotten so much further with the help he has received. Not all entrepreneurs share this key success attribute with David. When asked why he is so open to seeking help, David shares it is based on past failures when he was more "bull-headed." Hard lessons learned have changed him for the better. There are other keys, of course, including hard work, determination, being smart about money and listening to customers.



### The Future

Papa Jake's BBQ is becoming a serious business. It is growing and has considerable room for future growth. Jake understands he is getting older and this may be his last business venture, but he is excited about the involvement of family in this business. His grandchildren are involved and learning important lessons about business such as giving change, interacting with customers and discovering that work and life can be interwoven through entrepreneurship. He is hopeful that Papa Jake's BBQ will become a family business ensuring a longer life. Only time will tell, but there is a transition strategy already taking shape. For now, you can plan on David being the central character that brings life to this growing business in Western Iowa.



*We want to thank David Jacobson, Lori Holste and John Adams for their willingness to share their stories with us. We hope this story celebrates the life of one American entrepreneur, David Jacobson of Papa Jake's BBQ, and inspires other entrepreneurs to grow local economies by growing their business dreams.*

*This story was developed by Don Macke with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship ([www.energizingentrepreneurs.org](http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org)). The Center is part of a project called Pottawattamie County HomeTown Competitiveness or HTC supported by the Iowa West Foundation and the Pottawattamie County Commissioners. The Rural Pottawattamie County Business Success Program is supported by WIDA ([www.wida.org](http://www.wida.org)) and the Iowa Western Community College and Small Business Development Center ([www.iwccecenter.com](http://www.iwccecenter.com)).*

## Questions & More Information

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