



Running of the Balls / Photo by Perfecta Visuals

Greensboro Symphony explores diverse paths in building audience of the future

Going solely on attendance figures, the most popular supergroup in the Piedmont Triad is the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra. No other musical enterprise can claim to have performed before more than 50,000 persons during the last year. And that number only reflects the audience for the orchestra's educational programs for students in Guilford, Rockingham, Alamance, and Randolph counties.

Add the attendance figures for the orchestra's performances at the Tanger Center, and you've got some serious, blockbuster numbers.

"The best-kept secret about the Greensboro Symphony is our education concerts and programs," says Lisa Crawford, president and CEO. "We probably have the biggest education program for an orchestra on the East Coast."

Education outreach is just one component of the orchestra's ongoing effort to introduce itself to new

audiences, an initiative that has stepped up since the 2021 opening of The Tanger Center. The pandemic also intensified the orchestra's focus on audience development.

"We have made a very big effort to diversify the offerings we provide," says Crawford, who has been the orchestra's chief executive since 1999.

For proof, just look at the current season's offerings, which opened with Mariachi Cobre, direct from Disney World. The Krüger Brothers join the symphony in December, followed in the spring by alternative rocker Ben Folds and gospel artist Yolanda Adams.

"We want to be the symphony for our community and do things that appeal to the demographics of our community," Crawford says, "which is not old, white European men. That's why we have tried to up our game."

The forced hiatus of the pandemic led the symphony to reconsider its audience

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Greensboro Symphony performs for public school students at Tanger Center.

Photos by Lynn Donovan

'We want to do things that appeal to the demographics of our community!'

– Lisa Crawford
President & CEO
Greensboro Symphony Orchestra



Tony & Grammy award-winner Heather Headley.



Taking music to Millis Road Elementary School in Jamestown.

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Trends is a publication of the Guilford Merchants Association.



Learning opportunity

Felicia Brown, a business and marketing coach, was the presenter at a recent Teach Me Tuesday session at GMA. The events are free for all GMA members.

Five strategies to grow no matter what the economy does

BY MERIDITH ELLIOTT POWELL

I know some of you don't want to talk recession. And I get it. There is this feeling out there that if you just don't talk about it, then it won't exist.

Alternatively, there is the argument that if you don't participate in a recession, that somehow it will not happen to you.

Now, if that works for you, good for you. Who am I to judge? Maybe hope is a strategy. But for me, ignoring reality has never worked. I do much better when I see what is coming, embrace it, and create a plan.

While I may not be an optimist, I am not a pessimist, either. I do believe that no matter what the marketplace does, there is opportunity out there – a lot of opportunity. I think that your business could grow more in 2023 and 2024 than it did when the economy was red hot. Why?

Because your customers need you more when the marketplace is shifting and the economy is tough, than they did when things were healthy and consistent.

Additionally, a tough economy thins the herd. Your competitors either drop out, or they struggle because they don't adjust and don't change. This leaves the playing field wide open.

Things may be changing, and there may be obstacles ahead, but none of those things will prevent you from growing – if you are open to understanding how the marketplace is changing and can adjust your strategy.

Here are my five must-have strategies to grow, no matter what the economy does.

Secure your base

Begin by talking to customers with no intention of doing anything but learning. Before you can create a strategy for success in a shifting marketplace, you must understand how it impacts the most important part of your strategy – your customers.



Powell

As the marketplace changes, so will they. The challenges they face, the problems they are worried about, the goals they have

and, most importantly, the support and solutions they will need will change.

You need to invest the time necessary to learn what they need. This will enable you to build a plan that fills their needs and predicts their challenges.

Redefine customer service

No longer will remembering a customer's birthday and being hyper responsive be considered good customer service. If you want to succeed no matter what this marketplace does, you must redefine customer service.

Again, your customers need you. They need you to understand the marketplace, the obstacles they face, the challenges they don't even realize they have, and come to the table with new ideas and new solutions. They need you to provide confidence, a plan, and give them the secure knowledge that they can count



on you to help them successfully navigate this shifting marketplace.

You must redefine customer service to mean proactively providing customer solutions. Service now means being one step ahead of your customers, predicting their challenges and having the solutions and answers they need to succeed.

Super-charge your sales process

When the economy changes, so do your customers' and prospects' decision-making process. They both get more unpredictable. As this marketplace becomes more uncertain, customers and prospects are more reluctant to decide, and even more

We are in for challenging times. Recession changes everything.

reluctant to buy from a sales professional or business owner who appears to need the sale.

Success in a tough economy is a matter of increasing your activity so you have more moving through your pipeline. This creates more chances to close sales. You are then able to give customers and prospects the room they need to get comfortable with decisions.

The more you have moving through your pipeline, the less you will push prospects, the more confident you will be, and the more sales you will close.

Embrace the pain

The only way out is through. I learned that phrase years ago from a

groovy yoga instructor. Translation: You cannot avoid pain in life. The only way to find success and move past the pain is to move through the pain.

As this economy turns, and the challenges start to mount, don't run away from them. Don't avoid them. Embrace them.

If you accept the shifts and changes in the economy and focus on what you can control, you will start to discover fresh innovations and solutions that will be valuable for customers as well as for your own business.

Review and adjust

Last but not least, realize that some of the things you are doing now to grow your business will be obsolete in three or four months. It won't be your fault they won't work any more. It's just that, as this economy shifts, so will the skills and strategies needed to succeed.

To keep up and to continue to succeed, every few months you'll need to objectively look at which strategies work in your business and which don't. Then analyze what you could be doing that you are not. Review and adjust to stay productive, not busy.

We are in for challenging times, and this next year is going to be full of some unexpected bumps. But the coming year can be one of your best years ... if you embrace these strategies and realize that recession changes everything.

Meridith Elliott Powell is an author, sales strategist and leadership expert. She has been a featured speaker in GMA's Workplace Workshop series.



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The Guilford Merchants Association is a nonprofit organization founded in 1906. The Association is a business membership organization focused on supporting member companies with educational programming, lead generation activities, marketing opportunities, and overall enrichment while serving as a catalyst for community growth and prosperity.



Fair weather with friends

The late October weather was perfect for a Meet & Eat event in the GMA/FirstPoint parking lot in downtown Greensboro. GMA provided the lunch that was served by member business Giannos Catering.



Name: Bodai Williams (Bo-Day)
Residence: Greensboro
Age: 29
Education: Dudley High Early College Academy; studied biology at UNC Charlotte.
Business: Liberty Mutual Insurance
Role: Agent
Responsibilities:



I'm an insurance consultant, an advisor. I've been an agent for five years, but I'm new to Liberty Mutual. I specialize in home, auto, business and life insurance. I do everything except health insurance.

My favorite product is pet insurance for your fur babies. I am out meeting, prospecting, and sourcing with other business partners like Realtors, lenders, auto dealerships.

On GMA :

I was looking for a networking group where I could find my niche. My manager said, "There's this thing called GMA. You should really get involved." I love BIZ-Links, the Thursday

networking group. But I really like GMA, because you meet way more people.

On Risers:

Risers is fun. We're all young professionals, all hustling, trying to build our business. It feels comfortable to not know everything and still be able to relate. I feel like I can be myself.

Personal:

My dad was a Marine; my name comes from a mountain in Ghana. I was born in Brooklyn but I love Greensboro. My grandmother was an insurance agent. Sales runs in the family. I'm a model and do a lot of things outside of work that keep me busy and fulfilled.

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Greensboro Symphony

Continued from page 1

development strategies. Among the outcomes is a committee on equity, diversity, and inclusion. That led to working with the Hispanic League to bring in Mariachi Cobra.

Another change on the horizon is the departure of music director Dmitry Sitkovetsky, who has held the post since 2003. The orchestra will audition a short list of prospects before choosing a new music director, its eighth since 1959, next spring.

The orchestra's extensive music education programs include small ensemble concerts for all third- and fourth-graders in Guilford County Schools. In a partnership with UNCG, the orchestra offers string lessons to youngsters at Peck and Cone elementary schools.

Another initiative is KIDStra, in partnership with Guilford Child Development Center and Head Start. Story books are provided for all 4-year-olds in five Head Start programs. Symphony musicians provide music lessons, with the youngsters playing drums provided

by the program. It culminates with a concert where the symphony's percussion ensemble performs and a narrator reads the storybook as images of the pages are projected on a big screen. "They know the words on the page even before we say them," Crawford says.

Why the emphasis on music education? Numerous studies, she says, confirm that "learning music at an early age helps develop your brain."

The orchestra has been a GMA member for decades, and the relationship has been fruitful, Crawford says.

"One of our major sponsors was secured by our director of development at a GMA event, meeting him and talking to him about the symphony," Crawford says. GMA membership, she says, "provides a networking opportunity and way to meet people. We have a direct benefit."

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Satisfied customers, referrals keep roofing contractor's crews busy

You'll never see a cable TV ad for Roofing Renovations. You'll never hear a catchy radio jingle, either.

"We get almost all of our business from referrals," says Paul Bennett, who handles the company's residential business. Another employee takes care of condominium communities and other homeowner association (HOA) clients.

The 10-year-old company serves the Piedmont Triad and surrounding counties. On any given day, Bennett divides his time between making sales calls with homeowners in need of a new roof and supervising residential installations.

"We can have anywhere from 10 to 16 crews available to us" to do installs, he says.

A New Hampshire native, Bennett learned the construction trade from his father, a general contractor in the resort town of Wolfeboro on Lake Winnepesaukee. He declined an invitation to join his dad in the family business, opting instead to join the Navy. His military service launched a career in the culinary arts, which led Bennett to more than a decade with Marriott Hotels, first in California and then in New England.

So, how did a Maine chef wind up as a North Carolina roofer?

It was an unconventional

**PARTICIPATION
= SUCCESS**

career path, with lots of twists and turns. Along the way he did stints as a restaurateur, a banking manager, a telecommunications sales rep, a gourmet foods entrepreneur, an HOA maintenance manager, and owner of a deck construction and home renovations company.

"You know, sometimes life can be difficult," he says. "But you've got to do something about it. I like to call it MacGyverism."

(MacGyver, of course, was the title character of a 1980s TV show. With a Swiss Army knife, duct tape, and a few paper clips, MacGyver could always outsmart adversity and save the day.)

Bennett continues. "I've always taught my kids that, if you have a good work ethic and you're always looking for another opportunity – not that you're trying to change jobs every two weeks – but you're never going to be without a job. You'll never be unemployed. And that's been true so far."

Black Dog Gourmet, Bennett's culinary sideline, is a line of sauces and rubs that, prior to the pandemic, was in 37 stores "almost



Paul Bennett is in charge of residential projects for Roofing Renovations.

nationwide." In 2019, Bennett traveled to 27 food festivals to pitch his lineup. He briefly considered going all-in with Black Dog Gourmet, but – with a son in college and a daughter involved with competitive cheer – he decided the gamble was too risky.

It was the right decision, he says. Covid-19 came next, shutting down festivals and crimping sales.

Black Dog Gourmet's retail penetration shrank, but the brand is still viable.

"I call it my part-time, full-time job," Bennett jokes. "I'm in 17 stores and do a decent amount of online business."

Bennett was introduced to GMA and the Networking Gurus while in telecommunications sales. Now he's back in both, appreciating the marketing fit for

Roofing Renovations.

"We do anywhere from 150 to 225 roofs a year," he says. "And it's all by word of mouth, and my relationships with real estate managers, HOA managers. We just do a good job and do it right, and people refer us."

Roofing Renovations
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336-541-8044



Roofing Renovations depends solely on referrals and networking to build its business.



Steve Swetoha, Greensboro Swarm; Mark Prince, GMA & FirstPoint; Kathy Cates, Brand Connect.



**Novant Health
Fieldhouse,
Greensboro Swarm**

November 1, 2022



Rebecca Lane, Spangler Estate Planning; Joe Navarro, Growth Academy; Rachel Wall, First National Bank.



Many participants in the Running of the Balls dress for the occasion. This year's 5K takes place December 10.

When do the lights go up in Sunset Hills?

The Christmas balls season traditionally begins on the Sunday after Thanksgiving.

How do I participate in the December 10 Running of the Balls?

Registration information:
therunningoftheballs.com

David Bartenfield's video on YouTube:

tinyurl.com/bmmj9jh6

Andy Coon's video on YouTube:

tinyurl.com/mtk9csur

There's no cure for those irresistible lighted Christmas balls

As far as David Bartenfield is concerned, nothing compares to the magic of the Christmas balls in Greensboro's Sunset Hills neighborhood.

"I think of it as walking through a Dr. Seuss novel," he says. "That's what it's like, to me. The world of Dr. Seuss."

The colorful glowing spheres, dangling high in the hardwoods where only birds and squirrels go, fill the night sky with magic.

"It's something that only we have in Greensboro, that doesn't exist anywhere else," says Bartenfield. "It's like walking through the Truffula trees," as seen in "The Lorax."

A lawyer by profession, Bartenfield is an accomplished drone pilot and videographer. A video he made about the Christmas balls about five years ago has had more than 100,000 views on Facebook. It's also available on YouTube.

"I think it does a good job of catching the feeling," Bartenfield says.

Indeed it does.

Some history

It was some 25 years ago that Sunset Hills resident Jonathan Smith first took a mess of chicken wire, a string of lights, and a long extension cord, and pulled his first sphere high into a tree. He'd done it at the urging of his

daughter, who at that time was enrolled in the School (now College) of Design at N.C. State. She'd seen something similar in Raleigh and thought it was cool.

She was right.

The family made more lighted Christmas balls and hung them at rooftop level and higher.

Soon neighbors wanted in on the fun and the Smith family led a how-to a workshop.

Neighbor by neighbor, block by block, more Sunset Hills residents sent lighted Christmas balls aloft with each passing year. People came from all around to experience the magic.

Sunset Hills found itself featured on network TV news programs. Magazines ran feature stories. It was the sort of PR that money can't buy. Greensboro basked in the glow.

"Once you develop a love for lighted Christmas balls, there's no known cure," Jonathan Smith told documentary filmmaker Andy Coon in 2009.

Filling the pantry

There's more than pretty lights to the Sunset Hills Christmas balls. Neighbors started collecting food pantry donations in 2007. Five years later, a 5K race developed, with proceeds also going to feed the hungry.

The Running of the Balls

drew around 5,000 participants pre-pandemic. It's expected to draw around 4,000 this year, says organizer Nick Loflin.

Since 2012, 5K entry fees and sponsorships have raised more than \$575,000 for Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina. Food donations made by those who come to see the lights are additional.

"This kind of support is vital to our work," says Eric Aft, Second Harvest executive director. "We are grateful to the volunteer leaders, the neighbors, and the sponsors who bring this event to life."

The Running of the Balls is "a great community event," says Starmount resident Bonnie Meyer, "and it supports something really important in the community."

Her family of four has participated in the 5K for years. They look forward to renewing acquaintances with neighbors and old friends,



Fans who come to see the lights donate food that goes to Second Harvest Food Bank.

like the one now living in Alaska.

He comes back every year

for the holidays which, for him, kick off with the Running of the Balls.



Crowds descend on Sunset Hills throughout the holiday season.

Photos by Perfecta Visuals



Antoinette Johnson is guest services manager at Courtyard by Marriott High Point.

Volunteering introduced hospitality pro to another side of business world

When Antoinette Johnson accepted a new position at Courtyard by Marriott High Point, she knew she'd have to make some adjustments.

The first thing to be affected was her sleep schedule. As a veteran night auditor, she was used to staying up all night and seeing the sun rise. But in her new job as guest services, or front desk manager, her work hours would flip – on the job during the day, at home at night.

That adjustment, however, was relatively easy. The new responsibility that most challenged her was becoming active in GMA.

She recalls that Amoy Lindo-Coleman, Johnson's assistant general manager at the hotel, put it to her like this:

"Well, you'll be learning how to network, talk to other people, get to know the area ... because hospitality is tourism, and tourism is a lifeline for our area. I want you to become a member, along with me, representing the hotel."

Johnson, quite happy with the often-solitary world of a night auditor, was hesitant. "Is that part of my job description?" she wondered. Lindo-Coleman assuaged her fears.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

"She said, 'You'll like it. It'll be fun.'"

Johnson soon accompanied her boss to a GMA After Work Network event.

"We volunteered handing out stickers," Johnson says, "and it was a lot of fun. I got to meet people in other areas – IT, restaurants, and other businesses. And I was like, 'This is really exciting.' I really enjoyed it."

Lindo-Coleman says work schedules sometimes make it difficult to get to GMA events. She encourages co-workers to go when they can.

"When opportunity comes my way, I like to share," she says.

Johnson attended additional GMA activities, volunteering at each. She also attended the 2022 GMA Annual Dinner, where tennis star John McEnroe was the guest speaker.

"That was impressive. It was huge!" Johnson recalls. "And it was fun listening to him. I remember when he first came out. He was good. But he was hard-headed! Woo! He was hard-headed."

Though new to network-

ing, Johnson came into GMA as a veteran volunteer. Two decades as a night auditor for High Point hotels allowed her to volunteer frequently for her children's school activities, "making cupcakes, chaperone, that kind of thing.

"I guess it's always been in my blood," she says, "to step in and help out."

Becoming active in GMA has provided Johnson with new insights into how business gets done. The working world, she's learned, can offer opportunities for social interaction, mingling at sports events, and rubbing elbows with people outside your usual circle.

GMA and volunteering, Johnson says, "is very exciting, very eye-opening. It pushes me to push my kids. I'm like, 'Get out there, do things! You'll be surprised.' Whereas before, I'd just tell them, get a job.

"But now, since I'm experiencing this, I'm pushing them to experience it as well. I'm like, 'You'll be surprised at what business folks get together and do.'"

*Antoinette Johnson
Courtyard by Marriott High Point
1000 Mall Loop Road
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Could your company benefit from a microsite?

BY KEIR DAVIS

We all know what a website does. And from context, we can likely figure out what the term "microsite" means. But what exactly does a microsite do, and why might your company need one?

A microsite is a single web page or small website. It is created to promote a



Davis

company's product, service, campaign, or event. Microsites typically use a different web address from the main company website. It will include links back to the main website, but will act as a separate entity for the brand.

There are two main categories of reasons to do this.

One has to do with the customer experience of your brand. Examples of this may include:

- Promoting a specific product to a specific user.
- Promoting a specific initiative during a specific time frame.
- Experimenting with content different from the current brand guidelines.
- Expanding to a new geographic region.

The second has to do with how Google perceives and indexes your website.

BUSINESS SUCCESS

Things like keywords and metatags all clue Google in on what your site is about, who your target audience is, and what your key messages are. But if all of a sudden, your site pivots and starts focusing on new things, this can be very confusing to Google and will cause your rankings to suffer. That's why a microsite can be a great idea.

A microsite won't dilute your brand. Website users to your main site will still have the same user experience they've had in the past. Google robots crawling your main site won't think your website is about something entirely new.

Creating a microsite prevents customer and Google confusion. So the next time you are creating content that is markedly different or serves a markedly different purpose, consider a microsite. It can go a long way in keeping your customers and Google clear on the goals and aims of your brand.

Keir Davis is president of Greensboro-based Xtern software.

*Xternsoftware.com
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FirstPoint division earns reaccreditation

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Experiences as buyers led detail-oriented couple to set high bar as real estate brokers

We've all had the experience of paying for a product or service, only to think, gee whiz, I believe I could have done that better myself.

Maybe the purchase was a not-so-great hamburger. Or maybe the dissatisfaction related to a larger-ticket item. A real estate transaction, for instance.

That's what happened to Mike and Bethany Fields, real estate investors and owners of several rental properties.

"We had a Realtor that didn't work on our behalf as best they could," Mike explains.

That was the tipping point, the unnecessary bump in a home-buying experience that led the couple to become licensed real estate brokers.

Their mission, they say, is to make the experience of selling or buying a home

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

as smooth as possible. No unsettling surprises for the clients they represent, no communications fumbles that could jeopardize the deal.

The Fields say they want to structure transactions where clients "don't have any questions or doubts about what's happening, or what can occur."

The husband-wife broker team became licensed last year and are affiliated with Allen Tate, the Charlotte-based real estate firm that is the nation's third largest. They are based in Allen Tate's Oak Ridge office but serve the greater Piedmont Triad.

"In our years of real estate experience, we've remodeled homes independently and together,"

Bethany says. "We've had different experiences within the real estate world. It just made sense for us to make this next step."

Bethany, a Tennessee native, worked with Downtown Greensboro, Inc. (DGI) as an event planner before launching her new career. She also has experience in banking.

Her husband, a Guilford County native, has a background in telecommunications sales and the hazmat industry. His parents were commercial realtors and property managers, he says, which provided him with "table-scrap knowledge" of the industry. Bethany, he points out with admiration, "did it on her own."

"A lot of what we did (in previous careers) was detail-oriented and paperwork driven," Mike says.

Those years provided solid training, he explains, that transfers easily to real



Bethany and Mike Fields, Fields Real Estate Group / Allen Tate.

estate. And as owners of multiple properties, they can anticipate many of the questions and concerns of their clients.

"Where I'm weak, she's strong, and vice versa," he says. "We play off each other very well. We communicate with our clients almost excessively and hold their hand every step of the way."

Bethany became familiar with GMA during her time with DGI and explained

to her husband how the organization functions. He had already seen how she benefited from volunteering. GMA membership, he realized, offered them both more opportunities.

"It really aligns with our goal to get more involved with the community," he says.

Fields Realty Group / Allen Tate

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