

## Annapolis company takes advantage of 'captive audience'



**Donna L. Cole - For The Capital**

Josh Sweat, Amy Sweat and Patrick Sweat are targeting a captive audience in restrooms in restaurants and bars throughout the area.

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You see advertisements in the newspaper, on vehicles, at the movies, on the Internet, really almost everywhere.

About the only place you wouldn't expect to see an ad is a public restroom. But now, even the walls above urinals and behind stall doors are for sale.

"You're guaranteed a captive audience," said Josh Sweat, president of Annapolis-based Idle Time Advertising, which specializes in restroom advertising.

Mr. Sweat and his younger brother Patrick are from Charleston, S.C., and both went to Clemson University, where the older sibling met his wife, Amy, during their senior year. The three are part owners in the advertising firm.

"Amy is from Annapolis," Patrick Sweat said. "When they (Josh and Amy) graduated, they moved here. I'd been here a lot and liked the city, so when I graduated I moved up here."

Like many young professionals, they frequented lots of restaurants and bars, which led them to their next discovery.

"Everywhere you go down in Charleston there are advertisements in the restrooms," said Josh Sweat.

Not so in Annapolis. The more restaurants they visited, the more they noticed nothing above the urinals - other than potential.

"We decided to get into our own venture," said Josh Sweat, who along with his brother and wife opened Idle Time four months ago. "Some people thought we were crazy putting advertising in bathrooms, but it works."

He said the company essentially rents the wall space from the restaurants and "we pay them or give them free advertising elsewhere."

In a win-win situation, it turns out most don't want money.

"Actually most people prefer free advertising," Josh Sweat said.

Idle Time currently sells ad space in nine locations, mostly restaurants.

"Our target audience is 21 to 35 year olds; a very fast moving demographic," he said. "We get people when they're out spending money, doing what they're doing, and we target advertisers based on that."

Turns out, it wasn't a hard sale to the owners.

"We walk in, we say we have a way to basically eliminate graffiti and keep your customers entertained when they're in the restrooms," said Josh Sweat.

As for the advertisers, once they grasp the concept of selling their company in a restroom, the future is bright.

"It's actually just about getting people to understand what it's all about," said Mrs. Sweat.

One of Idle Time's advertisers is Maryland Sports Plex in Millersville, which offers indoor golf. They have an ad in the restroom of the West End Grill in Parole.

"I was here (at the West End Grill) last night and saw an advertisement for the Maryland Sports Plex," said Ted Orr of Annapolis. "I saw the ad last night and didn't think much of

it until this morning when I woke up and it was raining, so I came back to get the number."

Paul Rose, president of Arnold-based Plainfield Builders, said his company has already seen some results from the restroom advertising.

"Within a few weeks of posting the ads, we received a call from a lady that had seen our ad at Heroes Pub," Mr. Rose said. "She had a lot in Edgewater and was ready to build a new home."

The Sweats have to make an effort to draw the line between business and family. And it's not always easy, especially since they all live together.

"There's a family part and we have a professional relationship," Patrick Sweat said.

"I love it. These are great guys," said Mrs. Sweat. "I love them both. We also live together, too, all three of us. It can get trying sometimes. I call (Patrick) my second husband."

Then there's the realization that maybe a woman in the business does offer a calming perspective.

"She keeps us from tearing each others' heads off," Patrick Sweat said.

With an initial investment of about \$15,000, the company is closing in on being profitable.

"I see us expanding outward from Annapolis and greater Anne Arundel County," said Josh Sweat. "We're constantly adding new locations all the time. Long term, we'd like to expand to vacation spots like Ocean City. It's really limitless. It's such a new concept and industry."

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