The Possible Dream

Leap of faith in himself

puts entrepreneur

on path to success

by Rebecca Lauck Cleary

Photos by Kevin Bain
he stuck with it, as he is a well-respected leader within his company. He also gives a lot back to his community and is known for that as well. Our students have learned a lot from David. At this stage in their lives, students have dreams—some bigger than others. It's good to have individuals such as David to reinforce the idea that hard work can make dreams reality.”

Landrum doesn’t sugar-coat his message. “When I speak at Ole Miss, I tell students the best thing to do while you’re in college is to establish good work habits and don’t just lay up at the fraternity house after class. You need to be out there working a job,” he said.

He said the toughest part is that some students have bad work habits and believe they can goof off while in college and get motivated after graduation. It’s much better to have a goal early in the game, Landrum said.

“I tell students, one of the best things you can do is to call your parents and tell them you don’t want any money. Go out there and work on top of class and develop a work ethic. In business, you don’t win with a GPA, you win with common sense, attitude and work ethic so you need to learn to develop those.”

Landrum’s other focus is on real estate development, which he got involved with because of his children, Tommy, 26, and Lauren, love working with my family.”

The family is working on three residential developments in Madison County, one of which is especially noteworthy. In 1828, the township of Livingston was the county seat for Madison County, and Landrum has purchased nearly 500 acres there to rebuild the town.

“It’s a new urbanism development. We’re rebuilding the courthouse that was there, and there will be a chapel, a general store and a farmers market. It’s really going to be incredible on a very beautiful, historic site.”

When the project is complete, Landrum plans to relocate his financial business to the site.

To Landrum, being an entrepreneur means focusing on building your own dream instead of someone else’s and having control over your own destiny.

“You’ve got to be willing to swim upstream and be different. You can’t follow the same path as everyone else,” he said. “Another thing you have to do is persevere. One of my favorite sayings is that

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—David Landrum

23. Tommy (BBA 05) and his wife, Jessica Dowd Landrum (BBA 04), are involved in the family business and are interested in real estate as well.

“It’s great all working together,” Tommy Landrum said. “We have a very close family, and I feel really blessed to have the freedom to work with who I want. In my case, I

most people never run far enough on their first wind to find out they have a second wind.

“You’ve got to have a vision, because vision creates passion and passion will motivate you to implement the disciplines in your life that will help you succeed.”

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By 2010 more than 50 percent of the workforce will be in nontraditional jobs, many as entrepreneurs, according to author Dan Miller’s latest book, 48 Days To the Work You Love, (B&H Publishing Group, 2007). Mississippi native David Landrum is quite familiar with this statistic and is way ahead of it, having started his own business almost three decades ago.

Born and raised in an idyllic childhood setting in Tuckers Crossing, an area of Jones County outside Laurel, Landrum was the second-oldest of five children. He grew up learning the importance of family and hard work and, with unabated passion, also knew he had a purpose in life.

After leaving home, he wasn’t sure where that passion would take him. Then, while managing a health club, going to the University of Southern Mississippi full time and starting life as a newlywed, Landrum learned about Primerica, a financial services company that offers solutions to help families eliminate debt from their household finances and save more money for the future.

“Three things about the business appealed to me,” Landrum said. “I liked helping people, and I felt being in this business, I could do that. Also, I wanted to make extra income, and this company was an entrepreneurial-type company in that you could build a company within a company. I always wanted my own business, so this seemed like the perfect fit.”

While growing up, Landrum enjoyed many late-night conversations and brainstorming sessions with his brother, with both of them imagining possible business ventures. “The only problem was we had no money, no credit and a lot of dumb ideas,” he said. “I’ve always had a passion for having my own business, so when I saw in this company that you could earn a series of promotions with no politics—everything would be pre-set promotional guidelines—and there was no inventory, no payroll and no franchise fee, it just solved a lot of the old problems of having your own business.”

So from there, Landrum decided to take the plunge into being his own boss at Primerica. He quit his job at the health club and opened his first office in Laurel four months after he started. Five months later, he moved to the Gulf Coast and opened a second office. In 1986, he moved to Jackson to open his third office. Today he has 102 locations across the U.S. and Canada.

His wife, Jill, also took a leap of faith. “At the beginning, she wanted me to get out of college, move to Dallas and go into the oil business. So she was not a happy camper when I came into this business,” Landrum said. “But she attended an event hosted by the company, and she caught the vision that this was something we could do together. Jill got so excited, she quit her job at the bank, and we opened our first location, with her running the administrative part of it.”

The Landrums believe two heads are better than one when it comes to running Primerica. “A family business is very powerful because everybody’s got a vested interest, and everybody is focused on working together. It’s an adjustment working together, but I think you have to push through that and