

TOP STORIES THIS MONTH

FEATURES



ABOVE: Left to Right: Scott Niemeyer, founder and CEO of Deep South Studios; Randy Gervais, founder and owner of Checkbox; Jessica Inman, Louisiana market manager for Lyft; and Terrell Boynton, director of DXC Technology New Orleans Digital Transformation Center

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New & Notables

The following 13 professionals are daring to try something new — developing a business, taking on a new role, or taking things to the next level. We honor their efforts as Biz New Orleans' second-ever New & Notables.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFFERY JOHNSTON



Tom Cole
President and CEO, Republic
National Distributing
Company

The biggest news to hit the national wine and spirits industry over the past year happened last November with the announcement that Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC) is merging with Breakthru Beverage.

The two companies currently hold the titles of second- and third-largest wine distributors (respectively), with RNDC posting \$6.5 billion in annual revenues, followed closely by Breakthru at nearly \$6 billion. Together they are estimated to hold nearly a 60 percent market share with the new company, the name of which has yet to be announced.

It has been announced, however, that RNDC president and CEO, Tom Cole, who has led the 9,500-employee company since its 2006 inception, will serve as the CEO of this new venture. An Ohio native, Cole has called New Orleans home for 28 years. The company operates in Louisiana out of New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Lafayette.

"The beverage industry is consolidating and as we looked at opportunities to continue to grow — we're in 23 states now plus the District of Columbia — Breakthru was a good fit," he says. "It's a solid, family-run company, like us, that shares our values."

The merger is expected to close in the fourth quarter of this year but work has already begun to create a company Cole says will be "different, sustainable and transformative."

"You're only new once," he says, "so we're going to make the most of it. We're good now, but the goal is to be the best."



Scott Niemeyer
Founder and CEO, Deep South
Studios

Confidence in Louisiana's film industry is coming back, and Scott Niemeyer, founder and CEO of Algiers' Deep South Studios, is enthusiastic about praising the state's efforts to proclaim to all that Hollywood South is here to stay.

"Thanks to the state's new entertainment incentive program which Gov. Edwards signed into law last year, we have an even stronger ecosystem that supports and recognizes the importance of the entertainment industry to this state," says Niemeyer.

In 2012, Niemeyer — a producer of films including the hit, "Pitch Perfect," — began working on creating the largest independent film and television full-service facility ever constructed in the Southeast. Deep South Studios has currently completed three of the 11 buildings planned for Phase 1 of the project, totaling 35,000 square feet. Current plans include approximately 262,000 square feet of studio space.

The company has had a string of successes recently, including being chosen late last year as the state's first Qualified Entertainment Company (QEC). Under a new state program, entertainment employers qualified by Louisiana Economic Development can receive tax credits on annual wages paid on full-time jobs created for Louisiana residents. QECs may qualify for up to \$1 million in payroll credits per year.

Then in April, Deep South welcomed its first tenant, Production Resource Group, a global entertainment and live event production services company.

"I'm eager to see Louisiana back at its maximum potential in this industry," says Niemeyer, "and we're well on our way to getting there."



Randy Gervais
Founder and Owner, Checkebox

Three years ago, a senior at Archbishop Rummel High School in Metairie named Randy Gervais — whose family owns the audio/visual company Royal Productions — went looking for his own business idea. What he came up with was socks.

"I was looking for something everyone needs," he says, "something that is relatively inexpensive to make but has a high profit margin. So I thought, 'Why not socks?'"

Gervais focused specifically on men's dress socks.

"I looked at what was out there and I saw a lot of stripes, polka dots and argyle, so I thought I'd do something different — a checkebox print."

In August 2015, Checkebox was born. Just a few months into launching, Gervais sold \$30,000 worth of socks in just two weeks.

"I told my mom and dad, 'I think this thing is going to work!'" he says.

Now just 22 years old, Gervais runs a strictly online business that offers "socks that stay up all day" crafted from 100 percent combed cotton or a cashmere blend in more than 50 different patterns, as well as ties and pocket squares. Along with checkebox prints in every color, he offers fun prints like coffee cups, camouflage and even pink flamingos.

One of his most in-demand socks, however, came about as a result of a request from Louisiana's Lt. Gov., Billy Nungesser.

"He called me and asked if I could make a state sock that he could wear at the capitol, so I took the state seal and put it on a blue sock," he says. "They sell out as fast as I release them."