

# Columbia, Inc.

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Section C

## In T-SHIRT tandem

Couple's Lake City business expands to worldwide phenomenon

By KAYLA LOKEINSKY  
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Rob Summerall was always interested in business, but it wasn't until he looked at what was missing in Lake City that he knew what business he wanted to be in: the T-shirt business.

"I liked T-shirts," Summerall said. "How does that ever get old? I wear a T-shirt every day."

Over the past 15 years, Summerall, the owner and operator of Teeko Graphics Inc., has transformed his small T-shirt shop into a worldwide business that physically could not fit in its old building, resulting in its move to a larger facility with more room to grow.

Summerall started Teeko Graphics Inc. with a single screen printer back in 1999.

"At a very young age, I got a small loan, got my first piece of equipment, printed it to pieces, went to a trade show and got a bigger piece of equipment and it kind of went from there," Summerall said.

up and running, one contract turned into another. Eventually, the company became a federal contractor with the General Services Administration, creating T-shirts for air force bases and fire departments in countries all over the world, including Japan, Honduras and England, to name a few.

Eventually, Teeko Graphics Inc. started printing shirts for Zulily, an online retailer with over five million active users.

As the business grew, Summerall and his wife, Mary Summerall, knew the business needed to expand, but at a much faster rate than they expected.

"We already knew we needed to expand," Rob Summerall said. "We were already too cramped in that building. But genuinely being planners, we had a five-year strategy. We started buying up the property around us and we were going to build a facility. Then along came Zulily and it was like we can't wait five



KAYLA LOKEINSKY/Lake City Reporter

Mary Summerall, left, and Rob Summerall stand in their new Teeko Graphics Inc. facility on Main Boulevard. Teeko Graphics Inc. has grown and expanded since it was incorporated in 1999, resulting in the need for the business to move to a larger location.

Once Teeko Graphics got

T-SHIRT continued on 6C

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# T-SHIRTS

Continued From 1C

years.”

While the Summeralls were planning to build onto their old shop on East Duval Street, they ultimately decided it would be better for the business if they moved to a larger facility.

“It was decided that we can’t grow fast enough, we need to build fast enough, we need to now take our five-year plan and make it a two-year plan, which was done in a year and a half, and we expanded,” Rob Summerall said. “We had the foresight that we needed to grow. This accelerated that growth, the need for that to happen.”

Teeko Graphics Inc. recently moved into the facility that previously housed Sunbelt Honda Parts on Main Boulevard. The move allowed them to expand their business drastically. They have added a second screen printer, more storage space, an additional embroidery machine and vinyl machine, a showroom and several other key upgrades. There is also plenty of room for their daughters, Savannah, 7, and Paisleigh, 3, to ride their bikes around.

According to Rob Summerall, the move has resulted in their screen printing getting 250 percent faster.

“We have made every aspect of our business a little bit better,” he said.

Part of what has helped their business grow so much is Rob and Mary Summerall are very hands-on with the company. Mary, who started out as the Teeko Graphics Inc. bookkeeper when she and Rob started dating in 2002, came onto Teeko Graphics Inc. full time in 2012. Since then, they have done everything at the company from signing the checks to folding T-shirts.

“I think for us we’re not absent owners,” Mary Summerall said. “When the work needs to be done, you will often see Rob back there printing shirts and you’ll see me at the end of the dryer catching them and folding them. We’re very involved in our business and I think that plays a big part in it as well because we’re not just off hoping and wishing it’s going to happen. We’re here in the trenches with our employees, who are very valuable to us.”

Rob Summerall said Mary is more

of a manager and he is more of an entrepreneur, and it takes both working together to maintain a successful business.

“Without her here, I’m just the next great idea that could come to fruition or not,” Rob Summerall said. “With Mary here, she manages it to happen. She manages the good ideas. I know I couldn’t be where I’m at without her. I know I couldn’t have gotten any larger.”

While Rob Summerall knew he wanted his business to grow larger, he didn’t realize how much it was growing until it turned into what it is now.

“I wanted it to be big,” Rob Summerall said. “I thought it could be big. When it got there I looked back on it and said, ‘Oh, it’s kind of getting big.’ You just get so into the throws of it that dreamy eyes leave, the dream of being big leaves and the work of just getting it done takes its place.”

Although Teeko Graphics Inc. has grown into a worldwide business, their local customers are still their most valuable ones.

“I’ve had big opportunities before,” Rob Summerall said. “The Zulilys of the world, they come and they go, so our local customer base is of our greatest value. They’re always here.”

The Summeralls plan on continuing to expand Teeko Graphics Inc. now that they have plenty of room to grow on their new property. However, for them, there is a point where the business can become too big.

“End game: we’re family,” Rob Summerall said. “It gets to a point where business impedes too much for us to be centered in family. When we become maybe too corporate, we lose sight of it being a fun place. When our employees lose their name and become a number, that’s probably too big for me. I don’t have to be any bigger. We don’t want to be any bigger. I want to walk through the halls and know that person.”

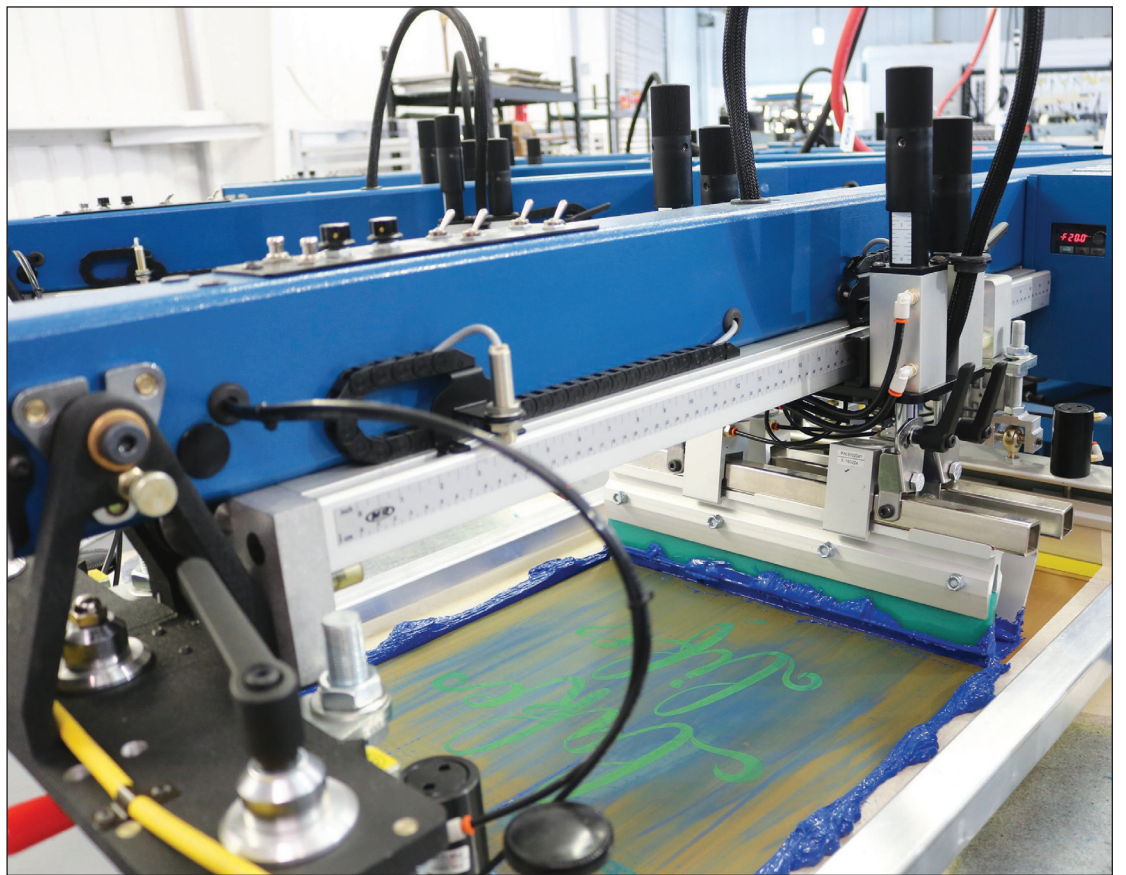
“And know a little bit about them and what kind of person they are,” Mary Summerall added. “That’s very, very important to us.”

On March 9, Teeko Graphics Inc. will be hosting an open house to allow members of the community to see the new facility and celebrate the expansion of their business.



Photos by KAYLA LOKEINSKY/Lake City Reporter

A selection of different kinds of Teeko Graphics Inc. T-shirts are rolled up in cans as part of the store's showroom display.



The addition of a new screen printer, shown here, has allowed Teeko Graphics Inc. to speed up their printing by 250 percent.

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