

OU alumnus Tim Clegg finds sweet spot in donut business

BY LYNETTE LOBBAN

A joke popular in schoolyards everywhere goes like this: “Wanna hurts donut?” The question is followed by a quick slug to the arm and the “punch” line, “Hurts, don’t it?”

University of Oklahoma alumnus Tim Clegg and his wife, Kas, decided to play on that pun when choosing a name for their business, although launching a donut shop in 2013 was no laughing matter for the Springfield, Mo., couple.

The Cleggs had just welcomed twins into their family and Tim was getting ready to deploy to Afghanistan with his U.S. Army Reserve unit when he started having vision problems. A battery of tests and MRIs revealed he was in the early stages of multiple sclerosis, a potentially disabling disease that affects the brain and central nervous system.

Clegg’s neurologist told him to take it easy and avoid stress—not an easy task for the former Marine with a growing family to support.

“We had a family business selling shaved ice that my dad started,” says Clegg. “But it was only open five months out of the year. Our pattern was ‘operate, then hibernate.’ When I got MS and could no longer deploy, we needed to figure out what our next step was going to be.”

The couple had spent a lot of time in donut shops while they were dating. Kas, Clegg says, is a “donut connoisseur.” They entertained themselves evaluating flavors and paying attention to design and layout, what worked and what they would do differently if given the chance. That chance came when the Cleggs took a leap of faith and decided to open a donut shop to bridge the gap in their seasonal business.

“We wanted to create a brand that was unlike anything in our area, something whimsical and different,” Clegg says.

They decided on, “Hurts Donut Company,” complete with a chocolate-covered donut wearing a Band-Aid as their logo. Their delivery truck was a repurposed ambulance ready to respond to “donut emergencies.”

The couple bought their first donut-making equipment on craigslist and watched videos of people making donuts

on YouTube to learn how to use it. “That was my training,” Clegg says. “We fired up our equipment for the first time successfully the day before we opened.”

When it came to flavors, he and Kas were curious and fearless. They tried popular cereals, cookies, candy—even bacon. The maple-bacon donut became their best-seller and one of Clegg’s personal favorites. (“It’s like pancakes and syrup and bacon, all in one!”)

“We would walk down the aisles of the grocery store and just grab something and try it,” he recalls. “Through our customers, we saw what worked, which in the beginning was everything. Whatever we were putting on our donuts, people were buying.”

Because of their initial success and Clegg’s love for OU, the couple opened their second store on Campus Corner in Norman within a year. As the business began spreading into 11 states with 24 locations and more than \$20 million in revenue, Clegg decided to go back to school to hone his leadership and business skills.

In 2018 he started a master’s program in management at American Military University. “I took a few classes online to see if I could manage my time,” he says. “Once I figured out I could do it, I submitted my application to OU.”

Clegg began the master’s program in organizational leadership online through the OU College of Professional and Continuing Studies two years ago. He graduated in May 2020.

“The program at OU made me a better, more self-aware leader, and being online allowed me to continue to work full time,” he says. “The best thing about it was learning so much from the instructors and other students that I was able to immediately implement ideas into the business and watch as change started to take form and develop, which was great.”

Clegg says learning how to be a better leader and businessman was much more compelling than his undergraduate work. “I was not an inspired student,” he admits.



OU alumnus and CEO and founder of Hurts Donut Company Tim Clegg says, “We wanted to create a brand that was unlike anything in our area, something whimsical and different.”

“By the time I made my way back to college and found myself in the administrative leadership program at OU, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life. And I knew how this education could benefit me.

“The program was so focused on elements of what I needed as a business owner that I couldn’t wait to get into my study each night and do the work. I looked forward to the start of each class. Every day, it was, ‘What am I going to learn from this?’ Then I’d turn around and apply it to our business.”

Organizational Leadership professor Ruby Daniels says Clegg was a “rock star” student.

“In addition to tackling hypothetical scenarios presented in class assignments, Tim regularly leveraged the discussion with his classmates to analyze problems and brainstorm about strategies and solutions for his small business,” Daniels says. “His enthusiasm, openness and collaborative spirit helped everyone in class to learn.”

After the economic slowdown due to the coronavirus, Clegg says Hurts Donut is continuing to grow and generate more franchise interest. “We have an incredibly talented

marketing team and franchisees who are amazing to work with.”

With his MS now in remission, Clegg says his diagnosis is still an important part of the Hurts culture. The company makes charitable donations to the National MS Society through its water bottle sales and National MS Society cycling team. The company also supports cancer research.

“That’s been a big part of us from the beginning,” he says. “I was raised in a very charitable environment. Even though we didn’t have much, I was taught to give what I could.”

Earlier this month Clegg rode his bike in a 102-mile fundraiser for MS in Texas. A week later, the 47-year-old came back to Norman with his family to walk in Commencement, which was not held in person last year due to COVID.

“If there’s anything I can put out there about going back to school, it’s that it’s never too late,” Clegg says. “You just have to have the right mindset.

“I think a lot of people believe they don’t have time, but I would argue that they do. It’s just prioritizing and learning how to manage your time. You can figure it out and get it done. I’m proof of that.”