



Harris County 2020 Small Business of the Year Application

1. As an aspiring entrepreneur studying business management at Valdosta State University, I knew that I wanted to one day own my own insurance agency. I had no idea that this dream would lead me to what has now become my home or that this place would one day be the location of the fulfillment of my dream. Tyus Insurance Group has been in business since the summer of 2008, but my insurance career in Harris County began long before that. In 1998, the Lord led me to a small town that I had never even visited before and to a place where I didn't know a single person. During the years of selling insurance in Harris County, I continued to foster relationships and grow more and more connected with the specialness that is this county. Through it all, I still had a longing to open my own business. In 2008, I was given an opportunity to acquire and purchase J. Smith Lanier in Manchester. This move afforded me the ability to provide better insurance services to families and businesses by opening the door to more carriers for my customers. Despite this location, I knew I one day wanted to have an established store front in Harris County. This dream became a reality in July 2018. Tyus Insurance Group is a LLC solely owned by myself. As an independent insurance agency, our most important goal is to provide residents and businesses of Harris County with the most professional level of service and attentiveness while offering the lowest rates and a variety of options for their individual needs. We pride ourselves on the relationships we establish with our customers and the security of knowing that we will provide them with the best service when issues arise. Ultimately, the underlying goal, though, is to do life alongside and build true, solid relationships with our clients.

2. Tyus Insurance Group has seen tremendous growth since opening its second location in Hamilton. Since opening our doors, we have achieved 15-20% new growth and added two new agents. Our business has also partnered with 20 other agencies in the state of Georgia to collaborate and share strategies for growth. We pride ourselves on our specialties in providing insurance services to local municipalities. Acquiring our Hamilton location helped to afford us this opportunity that no other agencies in our community have. Since opening my own agency, I have had consistent yearly positive growth. Although I am proud of these numbers, my true metric of growth is found in relationship building with clients and community members as well as the level of trust afforded me in other areas such as earning the trust of local builders, realtors, or general contractors who start referring their clients to me; city officials who trust me enough to sit on the couch in my office and ask my opinion; or supporting locally owned establishments like El Primo by aiding in their transition through support and encouragement.

3. In the beginning of 2019, I purchased an older storefront on the square in Hamilton. I had a vision of the potential beauty and charm the revitalization of the downtown area could elicit, and I was excited for my office to be a steppingstone for this redesign. In the few short months of this established location, it has had the desired effect. Every day, people stop by, call, or engage in conversation about the potential Hamilton has for expansion and development as a result of seeing what we were able to do with our storefront. These are the conversations we



want to foster in our community. Because of this newly established office space, I have been able to hire two new agents--one in the Hamilton location and one in the Manchester location. The newest hire, a recent graduate from Columbus State, has immersed himself in our community through civic organizations like the Harris County Cattlemen's Association and the Kiwanis Club. Since he lives in Muscogee County, he is a voice for our community to the younger generation and our bordering neighbors. He, too, has discovered the uniqueness and beauty of Harris County and is looking to move to our great community. When I designed the office, I wanted the space to serve as a gathering place. With this in mind, I created an open concept with a large conference table when you first walk in the doors. This space is available for organizations like Young Life and other church groups to use as a centralized meeting space for strategic planning and outreach. Since my wife is a lifelong teacher at Harris County High School, our pride in and love for this community runs deep. My business is always searching for ways to leave a mark and an impact on our community members whether it be through sponsoring football game balls to throw at halftime or the newly crowned Miss Harris County as she runs for Miss Georgia or even buying raffle tickets from every high school student and recreational sports team member that walks through our doors. Even more than these things though, our family and employees are cheerleaders for our county. We understand the blessing it is to live here and to do business here, and we want others to see what a hidden gem it is in the state of Georgia and the tremendous potential for growth and expansion that is right at our fingertips.

4. The vision for the future of Tyus Insurance Group is to expand and foster the reputation of a company that cares deeply for its clients and has a deep love for this community. From that type of service, I hope to not only grow my business financially but also with a mind toward relationships. When disaster strikes a client in our community, we pride ourselves on being there for them. No matter the time of day or day of the week, we are there with a quick and immediate response to guide them toward the steps for recovery. This past year when the tornadoes struck our area, my employees and I not only were fielding calls and setting up claims, but we also spent several days with our chainsaws and Kubota doing the hands-on work of cleaning yards and clearing roadways. This time of need afforded us invaluable conversations that revealed the deep need for true client-agent relationships. Additionally, our Hamilton storefront provides us with the opportunity to play a significant role in the revitalization of the downtown area. We know this is a prime area for development, but our desire is not to stop there. By serving as a Chamber Board Member, I have seen first-hand the tremendous areas for growth in our community--with the numerous new subdivisions under development and our exceptional schools, there is nothing stopping us from taking the necessary steps to share the vision with other businesses and nudge them to come alongside us in Harris County. Whether it be a new restaurant, a sales and repair shop, or a new set of doctors' offices, I am excited to come alongside these groups and provide them excellent insurance services but also friendship and mentorship as they establish their roots in our area. Selling quality insurance is the steppingstone for talking up the numerous opportunities our county affords to a plethora of types of businesses--we are passionate about the number of outdoor opportunities that Harris County has to offer. We strive to be a voice for the promotion of outdoor tourism from the Rails to Trails bicycle system to the highlighting of the Pine Mountain Trails to the tremendous wildlife and hunting opportunities our county possesses. As the President of the Harris County Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, our banquet in February draws people from all over to



celebrate wildlife and is an opportunity to promote our county. Last year, I pitched the idea of using city property in a neighboring county to create a mountain biking trail system to compliment the Pine Mountain Trail hiking system. These conversations are invaluable to the growth of our community. As much as I enjoy all that our county affords my business and my family, I can't help but long for others to see and experience what this community means to me.

Sincerely submitted,

Wesley C. Tyus, CLCS, LUTCF