

## McAleer's Office Furniture celebrates 40 years

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Local family-owned McAleer's Office Furniture is celebrating its 40th anniversary Friday, March 22, at their 3305 Springhill Ave., location in Mobile from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Food, drinks, door prizes and swag bags for the first 150 guests arriving will be offered.

Considering its history, company president Melissa Cross is thankful McAleer's survived their first year in business. "Hurricane Frederic struck in September of 1979, only 6 months after opening. The city and much of the area did not have power.

My dad had to close the store, and for 2 weeks assisted with hurricane damage assessments," Cross said.

Educated as a chemist, founder and family patriarch Jim McAleer was working in the construction industry in the 1970s. He was involved in the development of a building for an office furniture company in Mobile on Dauphin Island Parkway when the property unexpectedly caught fire. The building's owners at the time decided not to continue work on the site after the accident, deciding instead to get out of the business entirely.

"They had gotten to know dad and encouraged him to go into the industry because no one was refinishing and selling used office furniture," Cross said. "He knew he didn't want to be in construction forever, and wanted to own his own business. He decided open a store selling just used and refinished office furniture. Shortly thereafter, he started selling new office furniture as well."

Taking out a home equity loan, McAleer's Office Furniture was born. The first location was a 3,000 square foot space located at 2653 Springhill Ave. In the beginning the only full-time workers were McAleer, his wife and one full-time employee.

With a family that eventually blossomed into a full house of seven, all of the children wound up working there while growing up. None remained after college, however, choosing pursuits in other careers through the early 2000s.

Finding success after a rough start, the company moved to its present day site at 3305 Springhill Ave., in 1983 with an initial footprint of 14,000 square feet. In 1985 a 9,000 square foot Pensacola store was opened. Expansions continued throughout the 1980s, slowing down near the end of the decade with the purchase of Port City Tool. In 2014 a final upgrade of 9,000 square feet was made, creating a used furniture showroom. To date, McAleers boasts a space of 48,000 square feet.

Currently McAleer's has 19 full-time employees, with the most tenured worker approaching 30 years. In 2015 Jim McAleer retired. In 2018, youngest daughter Sarah McAleer returned as vice-president of business development.

"The biggest challenge for any brick and mortar store today is to embrace the online environment that shoppers want at a competitive price. We have our own online catalog, managed internally. Since we have been here for 40 years, we are able to leverage our buying power to ensure that our prices stay competitive." Cross said.

"We also intend to grow through expansion into new markets. Plans are in place to explore Baldwin County for a new retail location. Although we currently serve this area with deliveries every week, we'd like to provide people with a physical location, without the drive."