

2014 Breakthrough Graduate Mike Drouin

Mike Drouin is a third-generation carpenter, who worked with his father in the family business much of his adult life. But after his father passed away three years ago, the family business began falling apart.

"It was just too much on me and my mom," Mike says.

Mike, who began struggling with addiction, decided to make a change in his life. He entered the Justin's Place recovery program at St. Matthew's House, and after a few months found transitional work with another contractor. Unfortunately, he'd lost his passion.

"I still loved my job, but I hated going to work," Mike explains. "I was working for somebody else, and it wasn't working out."

Mike wanted to stay in the family trade, but on his own terms. St. Matthew's House told him about the Goodwill SWFL MicroEnterprise Institute, an intensive training program for people who want to start their own business.

"He was already an excellent worker," says Elliott Rittenhouse, Goodwill's director of microenterprise. "But he didn't know how to set it up as a business."

"There's so much stuff I never thought about: Financials, marketing, and all the planning," says Mike. "I learned that just because you know how to do the physical work, that doesn't mean you're ready to start a business."

Since completing Goodwill's MicroEnterprise program, Mike has formed his business, Drouin's Helping Hands, LLC. He's hired two full-time employees and another part-timer, all of whom are in the St. Matthew's House recovery for life program. He hopes to expand the business to as many as ten employees, and is studying for the Florida state contractor's examination, which would allow him to expand into larger projects.

Elliott credits Mike's success to his attitude and work ethic.

"It's his stick-to-itiveness," says Elliott. "He was very good at overcoming his daily obstacles to succeed in the course. He just applied that into his business directly and that's why he's successful today."

The business has grown so quickly that Mike was able to buy a house at the end of 2014. "We had a good year," he says. "Things are looking good."

