

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Young restaurateur is sure his bistro near OSU will succeed

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**Michelle Simakis**  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

When Lee Shadle was about 7 years old, he stood on his front lawn and sold acorns to his neighbors.

He persuaded them to buy the nuts for a nickel apiece by using his arms to frame the large oak tree in his front yard.

Such a small investment for such a big return, he told his customers.

At 22, Shadle still frames the big picture for investors.

This time, however, his oak tree is a restaurant near the Ohio State University campus.

Before his first restaurant, Pesto Creative Italian Bistro, even opened this past weekend, he started to negotiate a lease at Polaris for a second location.

Despite knowing the risks of the restaurant business — nearly 30 percent of start-ups fail in their first year — Shadle took the plunge.

He even seemed to thrive on the initial rejections, which he said "fueled the fire" for him to succeed.

Shadle created a business plan from a project for his marketing class at Ohio State University and took it to the Fisher Business Plan competition. Although the June graduate didn't win the \$100,000 prize, he began to look for restaurant locations and called banks for loans.

Banks rejected him. Campus Partners, a nonprofit community development corporation that developed the South Campus Gateway, wasn't sure it wanted to take a chance on someone with no experience.

That didn't stop him. And six months later, he had investors, a bank loan and a deal with Campus Partners.

Pesto, a fast-casual Italian restaurant, opened Saturday at the South Campus Gateway. Shadle said he has no doubt that it will succeed.

His parents are confident as well. Their house is riding on it. Tom and Kathy Shadle, of North Canton, cosigned on the \$400,000 bank loan and put their house up as collateral.

"I'm really, really confident," Mrs. Shadle said. "I mean, obviously, we're confident that this is going to happen or we wouldn't have ever cosigned.



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**Lee Shadle, 22, has just opened his first restaurant, Pesto Creative Italian Bistro, near the Ohio State campus, and already has begun scouting locations for a second.**



**Life stories**

*Our community fabric is woven with colorful characters and interesting people from all walks of life. Each Monday, The Dispatch profiles one of those people in this special feature.*

"But there are moments when I think, 'Oh, my gosh, what have we done?'"

Lee Shadle said he experienced those same moments and was kept awake at night by the "what ifs."

But his parents reassured him.

"You have to look beyond yourself and be willing to take a chance," Mr. Shadle said.

"If we have to start over and live in an apartment again, that's fine."

Lee Shadle said he has always wanted to own his own business. His mom remembers one of his early ideas — a bedroom salad bar.

Shadle wrote his various business plans in a journal he keeps in his apartment, which is right above Pesto.

But he said Pesto is his best yet. He's so confident that he and Ron Santibanez, his restaurant consultant, have discussed franchising.

And he and Santibanez are writing a book on entrepreneurship and start-up businesses. The two are starting a speaking tour in January.

"His focus is a lot different than most of my customers who are happy with one restaurant," said Santibanez, president of Qualified Solutions Consulting in California and Shadle's director of operations and franchise development.

The consultant, like others asked to help create Pesto, was hesitant at first, partly because of Shadle's age and lack of experience.

"My first question to anyone is, 'Are you funded?' Then I go through a series of other questions . . . and surprisingly he had the answers to all of them," he said.

"That was surprising to me that someone young in the business would have not only the ability to do the research, but have the insight to do it."

Santibanez said Shadle surrounded himself with the right people to help create Pesto.

Kevin Maxwell, a longtime friend and neighbor, is who Shadle calls his "chief image officer."

Maxwell used to invite Shadle and his friends over to teach them how to cook.

Shadle was in Maxwell's kitchen when they brainstormed the idea for the Chipotle-like restaurant.

"He's been told point-blank from people he admires that you cannot sit back and that you have to go forward and grab your dream and run with it," Maxwell said. "And he has gone and made it happen."

**Send suggestions for profiles to [lifestories@dispatch.com](mailto:lifestories@dispatch.com) or to Mark Somerson, The Dispatch, 34 S. 3rd St., Columbus 43215.**

**[msimakis@dispatch.com](mailto:msimakis@dispatch.com)**