

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER



NEWS ALERT

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Michigan Couple Turns Hiking Experience into 3D Virtual Tour App & Tech Start-Up

University Center, MI – July 23, 2014 – Denny and Kevin Henson of Midland, Michigan have evolved their love of hiking trails, reading maps, and reliving history into a 3D, interactive virtual tour application for Web, mobile, and tablet devices. The award-winning, cloud-based software application of Map-N-Tour, Inc. can be used to create custom, media-rich tours for heritage tourism, historical and recreational trails, downtown and business districts, community profiling, events, genealogy and much more.



The virtual trail idea started back in 2007 when Kevin Henson learned his Boy Scout Troop wanted to participate in the River of Time Living History event (Bay City, www.riveroftime.org). After looking into the event, he discovered there was no representation from the Mexican War and that a number of his Mid-Michigan, 11-year old scouts had ancestors who had served in the conflict as members of the Mormon Battalion. From there, Kevin began researching the 2,100 mile march of the military group and discovered there were discrepancies between the stories written in journals and the physical maps of the accepted route.

As Scout Leader and an avid living history re-enactor, Kevin set out to retrace the steps of the military group and the areas in which the infantry had passed through to provide an accurate account of history for his scouts and to engage other family members of those who had participated in the march. Kevin's wife, Denny, joined him on the six-month trek from Iowa to California. During the hike, the couple began sharing what they found online via an early version of their application using Google Earth with pinpoints and text bubbles along the trail.

"I was the storyteller who wanted to make it easy for others to access historical data," said Kevin Henson, Mapping and Project Consultant for Map-N-Tour. "Denny was the visionary behind the application as she saw greater potential for using the tool on multi-dimensional levels."

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Denny's vision was to share, educate, and enrich others' experiences by bringing stories to life online in an interactive manner. She wanted the user to feel immersed in the story whether it was following a historical trail, getting to know a community, or participating in an event ... even if they couldn't be there.

"We knew this application had the power to engage as we'd watch people lean into the screen as we did our early presentations," shared Denny Henson, President/CEO of Map-N-Tours. "One of our stories held the attention of a 5-year old for over 30 minutes. That was truly inspiring!"

With no programming skills, the initial platform and interface was simple. But Denny knew they needed to expand its capabilities; as well as, make it mobile-friendly. So she got busy. She found tech consultants to work with, hired developers, and assembled an Advisory Team that included professionals with information technology (IT), business management, sales, and marketing experience. One of her first recruits was Greg Boss, Map-N-Tour's Chief Technology/Information Officer. Boss brought more than 17 years of IT experience to the company along with a portfolio of over 300 patents.

During this time, Denny also began working with a number of the Business Consultants from the Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Great Lakes Bay Region (GLBR) and Technology Business Consultants from the Michigan SBDC Tech Team. Together, these SBDC consultants provided her with a diverse array of no-cost, hands-on support in developing the company's business plan, preparing financial models, understanding management strategies, obtaining market research, designing marketing strategies, and more. The consultants also provided introductions to key business professionals and contacts.

"The SBDC has had a great impact in shaping our business as they showed me I didn't have to do this alone," said Denny Henson. "From introducing us to our first client and providing us with valuable business resources to just being a cheerleader for our product."

Since the launch of Map-N-Tour, the company has grown its team of developers who have inspired several generations of their cloud-based software application. The company added mobile/tablet applications to their list of core competencies in 2013 and filed its first provisional patent application in early 2014. The Map-N-Tour team strives every day to make the application the best it can be using the latest advances in technology. The company was also recently invited to integrate its application with the Location One Information Services (LOIS), which is the oldest and largest economic development building, site and community database system in the country.

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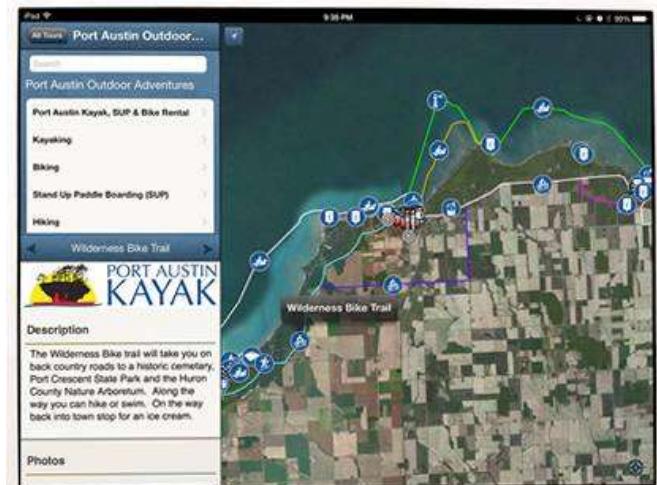


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The company has also received several awards, including being selected as the 2012 Best Small Business for the Michigan SBDC GLBR and received a Silver Excellence in Economic Development Award for New Media in 2013 from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). One of their first clients, Midland Tomorrow, also received a Silver Award in New Media from the IEDC in 2012 for using Map-N-Tour's application and a Web Site Award for a Community with a Population of 50,000 – 100,000 People from the Michigan Economic Developer Association (MEDA) in 2012.



"The awards are wonderful but what we hear back from our clients is the most rewarding," shared Denny Henson. A few of those statements, include: "It's not just a product but an experience!" and "It allows us the opportunity to teach the unknown in a multi-dimensional experience."

Charlie Walker, President and CEO of the Chippewa County Economic Development Corporation in Wisconsin shared, "The tool is flexible and allows us to do a lot of unique, creative, and innovative things. Being able to customize our virtual tours to specific industries has given us a competitive advantage."

Founded in 2012, Map-N-Tour is a certified woman-owned, privately-held business located in Midland. The company's award-winning software excels at marketing tourism, economic development, public history, events, and genealogy. To learn more about Map-N-Tour and to view one of their tours, visit them online at www.mapntour.com. You can also follow them on Facebook (www.bit.ly/MnTFacebook) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/mapNtour). To request more information or to schedule a presentation of the application, contact Denny Henson at (989) 493-5147 or via e-mail at denny@mapntour.com.

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About the Michigan SBDC

The Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC) provides counseling, business education, information-based planning and technology commercialization to new and existing businesses throughout Michigan's 83 counties.

The Michigan SBDC is located at the Grand Valley State University, Seidman College of Business in Grand Rapids, Michigan. As host of the Michigan SBDC State Headquarters, the Seidman College of Business oversees the eleven-region Michigan SBDC network. Entrepreneurs and small business owners may access the services of their nearest Michigan SBDC by calling (616) 331-7480 or visiting www.SBDCMichigan.org.

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