

Yadkin Ripple Personality Profile: Kevin Austin

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It may be hard to picture Kevin Austin decked out in motorcycle gear and racing dirt bikes at top speeds. The county commissioner chairman who manages manufacturing for Austin Electrical Enclosures and spends his days attending meeting after meeting to fulfill his civic duties has a need for speed.

Austin was born in Albemarle, NC. His family moved back and forth between Albemarle and Greensboro during his early years before finally settling down in Greensboro where Austin grew up and graduated from Grimsley High School.

At the age of 19 Austin purchased his first motorcycle and began racing regularly. He went on to North Caro-

lina State University and continued racing every weekend.

"It's just something that I was always interested in reading about in magazines when I was a little kid and we always had little mini bikes to ride around the yard with and when I was able to make a little money and get my own bike I

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did," Austin said.

While he was serious about racing Austin also put focus on his academic career. He went into school working towards a degree in aerospace engineering but after realizing that his degree would send him across the country for work he decided that he wanted to change his engineering degree to fit in with the family business, The Austin Company.

"My older brother joined the company just before I did and my older sister's husband joined the company at that time as well," Austin said. "My dad retired in 1993 and the three of us have been running it since then."

During this time Austin was also starting small businesses of his own that related to his passion for racing. His first business was created in the late 1980s. It was called Hammerhead Graphics and Austin would create custom painting on helmets for motorcycle racers.

"I had my work on the cover of magazines and a lot of the top racers across the country at the time," Austin said. "It was pretty well established."

Over time Austin's entrepreneurship ventured down another path and he began a casual clothing line called Ballzee that was geared towards motorcycle riders. Austin said that he acquired a big rig and would drive all over the country selling his apparel, heading out Friday afternoons after work and returning at dawn on Monday morning to start the next work week.

Austin moved to Yadkin County in 1990.

"I found that I like Yadkin County way better than any other place I had ever lived for a variety of reasons," Austin said. "I can't imagine a better place to live and that's why I'm here and why I've stayed here."

In 1991 Austin mar-

ried his wife Cindy. She was a lifelong resident of Yadkin County and grew up on a dairy farm. In 2008 the couple welcomed their first son, Ryder.

Austin said that his push to start his work in public service came during the debates of the location of the jail. The commissioners at the time were pushing to build the jail across the street from his business, which was also a residential community.

"When they were going to build it across the street from my business we had some people in the community ask us if there was anything we could do to help," Austin said. I talked it over with my brother and brother-in-law about our roles as citizens in the community first and...we felt like it was our responsibility as a neighbor to step up and try to help the community."

Austin ran and was elected as a county commissioner and began his work to get the jail addition built beside the existing jail. Austin said that he feels that everyone should find a way to serve at some point in their life.

"I always joke that everyone should take a turn. Whether that's being a deacon in your church or serving as a commissioner, everyone should step up at some point in time," Austin said.

Austin said that he was told by several people that he should prepare to have a difficult time with people during his time as commissioner but that he still hasn't found that to be the case.

"I always heard that you need to grow a thick skin and that it's a thankless job but I haven't really found that to be the case," Austin said. "I always try to take a level headed approach to everything and not allow myself to get emotional or angry because usually when somebody is concerned or angry they have a good reason for it

and they deserve to be heard and considered. I think if you're fair to people and treat them with respect then you don't have to grow a thick skin."

Austin's motorcycle days grew numbered once he took on the position as county commissioner. He said that a wreck during a large race in Gainesville, FL at the age of 40 was what opened his eyes that his racing days may be over.

"I got hurt pretty bad then and I got to spend a week in the hospital in Gainesville, FL and then another week at a hospital in Winston-Salem when I got back from Gainesville," Austin said. "I've still raced some since then but that was probably my last bug hurrah in racing. That kind of took the wind out of my sails. It was probably time for me to move out of that phase anyways."

When he's not busy serving the county's needs as commissioner Austin also serves as the president of the Yadkinville Downtown Business Association, a board member of the Yadkinville Rotary Club and on countless committees and boards through his duties as commissioner.

Austin said that these days he likes to sit back and watch Ryder grow up. He enjoys dropping him off at preschool in the mornings and watching his soccer games on the weekends. He says that he doesn't have any major goals or plans in life other than to enjoy his community and love his family.

"I'm just enjoying life and the little stuff," Austin said. "I've never really operated off any long-term goal. I just kind of go with the flow."

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