

THE PULSE

ON LAKE NORMAN BUSINESS



Family firm foils fakes and frauds

By Chris Montgomery

news@lakenormancitizen.com

Jim Rockford, Thomas Magnum and Charlie's Angels were all crackerjack detectives. Those classic television shows were neatly packaged between commercial breaks and solved within an hour. But their predictable storylines were also a far cry from reality.

By contrast, Huntersville-based Vaudra International is an actual investigating firm with proven results.

Vaudra International started over a dinner conversation between Randy Rabenold and Howard Dozier, both of whom have law enforcement backgrounds. Their vision, first scribbled on a cocktail napkin, centered on intellectual property and traditional, run-of-the-mill cases. After more than a decade in Mecklenburg County, Vaudra International has amassed a loyal following of corporate accounts and is highly respected among its peers.

Enter Tamara Rabenold, who took a series of twists and turns before joining Vaudra International. Following graduation from

Winthrop University, she secured a position with an advertising agency. As fate would have it, her office space was situated directly across the hall from a future client, employer — and husband.

After retaining Vaudra International as an advertiser, the relationship between Tamara and Randy Rabenold blossomed. They became fast friends, meeting regularly for coffee, discussing current events and attending each other's office Christmas parties. Intrigued, the future private eye researched the industry. At the same time, Vaudra International privately discussed asking the marketing guru about working for the company. Eventually, both parties agreed to terms and she was hired. Neither of the Rabenolds has ever looked back.

Missing persons, cheating spouses, fraud and embezzlement are some of the many areas of expertise at Vaudra International, but brand protection has provided a steady revenue stream for the business. A lack of consumer knowledge fuels the ever-growing world of counterfeiting.

"Everything you can think of is



CHRIS MONTGOMERY

Tamara, Randy and Ryan Rabenold are the family members behind investigating firm Vaudra International, based in Huntersville.

copied," says Tamara Rabenold. "Clothing, brake pads, make-up kits, sunglasses, you name it. If it can be manufactured, it can be counterfeited."

Descriptors such as Kleenex, Q-Tips and even "escalator" are so engrained in buyers' minds many forget they are brand names. That could be good or bad for retailers. Since most consumers are accustomed to everyday experiences with these products, it's easier for a counterfeit to slip into their shopping carts. Online purchases have

compounded the problem and are more difficult to monitor, even by the experts. Each factor ultimately leads to stifling the local economy, crippling small start-ups and negatively impacting sales for the originator.

The Rabenolds are constantly scanning the Internet for frauds. Flea markets and sports and concert venues are other hot spots for fake products. Closer to home are the plethora of NASCAR and Carolina Panthers rip-offs. The old adage — if it looks too good to be

true, it probably is — helps when curtailing scammers. Local, state and federal authorities are kept busy with sting operations, emptying full warehouses of counterfeit goods.

Vaudra International has nine employees and is one of only 40 percent of agencies in North Carolina considered a fulltime business. It is rated as one of the top investigators according to expertise.com, a website dedicated to finding the best and most thorough professionals in the state. The company is licensed through North Carolina Protective Services and is fully insured.

Tamara Rabenold currently serves on the board of the North Carolina Association of Private Investigators.

Ryan Rabenold, their son, recently received a degree in criminal justice and is now working alongside his father. The family business is growing, too, with Tamara's brother-in-law, Mark, opening a satellite office in Asheville

Need a spy?

Find out more about Vaudra International at vaudra.com or call them at 877-BRAND-IP.