

RETAILER PROFILE

T Abeles & Son:

A Father-Son Duo Helps Customers Walk on Air

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Terry Abeles believes so wholeheartedly in his product because he is so passionate about helping people. At his family-owned business, T Abeles & Son in Ridgeland, Mississippi, Terry and his son primarily sell kybun shoes. These shoes work miracles as they significantly reduce the pain many people experience while standing and walking.

Discovering kybun

Terry didn't always sell kybun products, but the shoe business has always been in his blood. Growing up in Little Rock, Arkansas, his parents were shoe retailers, and Terry was selling shoes out of their store by the time he was in high school. He later became a manager at Butler's Shoe Store in Detroit, where he met his wife, Sherie, in the lobby.

Over the following years, Terry worked his way up in the industry by serving various shoe retailers in both the independent and department store sectors. He and Sherie purchased their own shoe store, T Abeles & Company, in Ridgeland 34 years ago and have been in Mississippi ever since.

Terry and Sherie sold a variety of comfort and health brands until 2016, when they discovered the product that would forever alter how they sold shoes. Enter kyBoot: the swiss-air cushion shoes from

kybun that alleviate many aches and pains for the wearer.

Terry says it's almost unheard of to sell



a pair of \$400 shoes in Mississippi – but now he does it for a living. After only six months of selling kybun, Terry and his wife were so impressed with the shoes and how they therapeutically helped people that they flew to Switzerland to meet the creator of kybun himself, Karl Mueller.

Life-Changing Footwear

Mueller told Terry the story of how

he worked in a rice paddy in Korea as a young man. When the rice paddy was drained, it became soft and springy to walk on, and Mueller noticed that he no longer felt pain in his knees and back. This inspiration would lead to the creation of kybun shoes, which are made of a soft, springy material that does not compress over time. This material makes the muscles in our feet and lower legs stronger, keeping us healthy and pain-free.

According to Terry, the two factors that cause people the most pain are walking on flat, hard surfaces with hard-soled shoes with heels, and sitting too much. Kybun shoes provide total foot support and ease pressure and tension to create strong feet in order to alleviate pain in the body – all while making the



Well-organized interior
of T Abeles & Son.

Terry and Tedd Abeles post information and videos on their website and Facebook page.



wearer feel as though he or she is walking on air.

Terry also sells another kybun product - the kybun Mat - made of soft and springy material just like kybun shoes. His customers can put the mat in their workspace to help them build balance and stability and strengthen their core as they stand on it throughout the day.

T Abeles & Company Becomes T Abeles & Son

In the two years after meeting Mueller in Switzerland, kybun became 62% of Terry's total business. When his lease was up in 2019, he closed his 3,000 square foot, multi-line store and turned it into a 1,200 square foot store focused on kybun and its companion brand, Joya. At the same time, Sherie decided to retire and one of Terry's twin sons, Tedd, joined the business. Terry and Tedd reopened their revamped business with a new name, T Abeles & Son.

Upon speaking with Terry, it's clear that he chose this new business model not only because he believes in his

product, but because he is incredibly passionate about helping people.

Terry says, "It's amazing to watch what happens when somebody comes in and they have pain in their neck, back or ankles. They put on our kybun shoes, walk around for a minute and can't believe it."

Terry's shoes help his clients improve their posture and gait. They can help fix ailments ranging from plantar fasciitis to neuropathic pain. Terry has even experienced relief from the shoes himself. He has a bad back, and when he first tried kybun shoes, he needed to find a chair after standing for 15 minutes. Today, he can stand up for over an hour. "When it comes to these shoes, life-changing is not an exaggeration," he proclaims.

Terry is so confident in his shoes' ability to make a positive impact in his customers' lives that he offers a risk-free "Try Before You Buy" policy. His customers

can make a \$200 deposit and try a pair of kybun shoes for two weeks before deciding to make a purchase, toward which their deposit is applied. If the customer isn't happy with the shoes, their deposit is refunded, and they part ways "as a friend," says Terry.

When asked what he wishes his customers knew, Terry says, "I wish they knew they really could get out of pain from standing and walking. Kybun products feel so different from a traditional shoe. It's pretty amazing that in Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation, I can sell so many shoes at \$400 a pair."

Surviving the Pandemic

Terry and Tedd were just hitting their stride with their new business model when COVID-19 reared its ugly head. They were able to receive PPP support, which helped them weather the storm.

Terry believes that if he still had his old store model when the pandemic hit, his business wouldn't have survived. He credits his new store model, which is easier and less expensive to run, for getting his business through the pandemic.

"Being a business owner for most of my years, my heart goes out to other small business owners in this pandemic. Some people don't understand. If you've struggled to stay in business, you put your heart, soul, blood, sweat and tears into the business. COVID doesn't give you a chance to fight back, which is devastating," Terry empathizes.

However, Terry has experienced one silver lining throughout the pandemic.

Personal Glimpse

SRT: What is on your bucket list?

Terry Abeles: My wife and I have always wanted to take a trip to Australia but we haven't made it yet.

SRT: What philanthropic programs have you participated in?

Terry: We've supported local animal shelters and Soles4Souls.

SRT: What is your favorite quote?

Terry: I love the Clint Eastwood quote from *The Outlaw Josey Wales*: "When things look bad and it looks like you're not gonna make it, then you gotta get mean. I mean plumb, mad-dog mean. 'Cause if you lose your head and give up then you neither live nor win." At one point over the years, when we were about to go broke, we hired a consultant to help us survive. I hung that quote above my desk where I could always see it, and it's still hanging there today. I believe you have to keep fighting and you can't give up."

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He has enjoyed working closely with his son over the past year and feels that the experience has brought them closer together.

The Future of T Abeles & Son

When asked what makes his business special, Terry said, “We’ve been here for 34 years. We’re in a strip mall, but people always find us because of our unique product. We believe in excellent customer service. We’ve learned what we believe in – it’s what helps people. We’ve spent time learning how things work,

and trying to develop and find the best brands for our customers.”

Terry started the updated store model with his son’s future in mind. “I wanted my son to have a profession,” he said. Currently Tedd is 25% owner and is in training to take over more of the business soon. Terry likes the idea of being semi-retired while his son begins to take on his legacy. “He’s a father of two sons, he’s grown up, and he’s doing a great job running the store,” he says of Tedd. “He sees a life where this is his career.”

Terry also sees growth and many opportunities for the business down the road. “You can’t buy paid advertising like the testimonials and word of mouth we have,” he says.

As Tedd transitions into his father’s role and the business rebounds post-pandemic, T Abeles & Son will continue to provide the high level of customer service and value their shoppers have come to expect. ■



A sampling of the styles available at T Abeles & Son.