

NEED FOR SPEED: Annual bike races continue in Lexington. **1B**

RUSSIAN SPY SWAP: Agents were pawns in a practiced game. **8A**

DECISION DAY: Young hurler casts lot with North Carolina. **1D**



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East Coast Wings owner flying high

BY PAM HAYNES
 ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

HIGH POINT — It may seem like an unusual place, but Lisa Allen was standing in a hotel room in Manhattan Beach, Calif., where she was working for a large, corporate entity, when she realized she wanted to operate her own restaurant.

Allen was a procurement agent for a pharmaceutical company at the time, and she lived in the same hotel room for two years while working the job. She had left the farm in South Carolina where she grew up, graduated from Clemson University and began her career. In all measures of success, she had made it. But something still wasn't right.

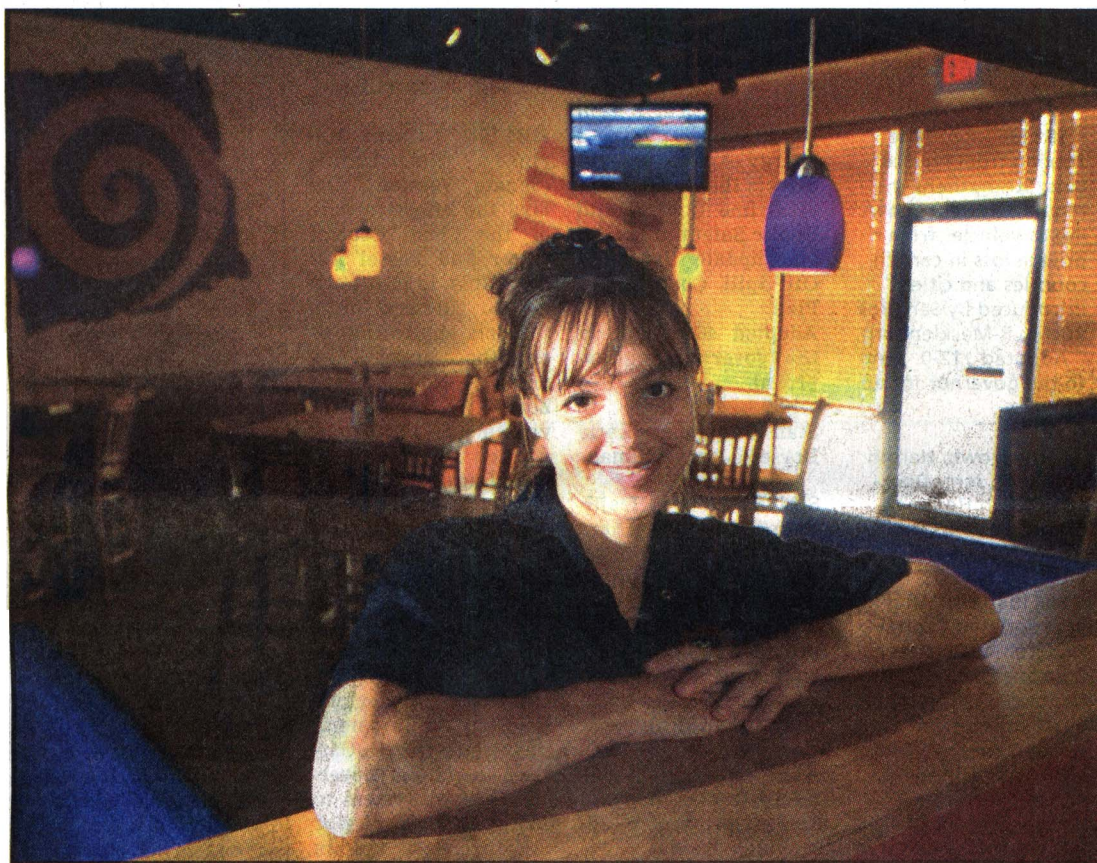
"I had a lot of time in that hotel room to ask myself, 'What do you really want to do,'" she said.

The answer was just as unlikely. But, after a lot of soul searching, she found that operating the East Coast Wings and Grill at 2900 N. Main St. in High Point was exactly what she wanted.

Looking back, Allen, 37, has trouble answering the question, "Why wings?" She interviewed with several different restaurant franchises for one year after she left California, and hot wing establishments just seemed to be what she was looking for.

"Wing restaurants are places you can come with your family, a group of girls or a group of guys and have fun," she said. "It isn't too formal. You don't have to worry about getting wing sauce on your shirt. You can just have fun."

It may not be formal, but since Allen bought the restaurant in 2004,



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Business is booming at East Coast Wings, where manager Lisa Allen said sales have increased fourfold, leading to two expansions.

it has been profitable. When she opened, the business was averaging about \$30,000 a month in sales and operating in a 1,400-square-foot space. Today, it averages \$135,000 a month, a total of \$1.62 million per year, and has expanded to 3,950 square feet. In its most recent expansion in May, Allen almost doubled her staff to 30 employees, and a full-service bar was added.

"This is just a fun, energetic place to be," she said about the restaurant's sizzling success. "I've learned that you have to have a combination of good food and a good atmosphere. And the team that stands behind me is an amazing staff."

Her staff certainly is important, but Allen can't deny that she has a strong work ethic of her own, one she began to develop as a child, that

LISA ALLEN

Occupation: Franchise owner of East Coast Wings and Grill on N. Main Street

Age: 37

Hometown: Kinards, S.C.

Hobbies: Spending time with her two Australian Shepherds

Favorite food: Southwest Salad from East Coast Wings and Grill

Favorite music: Top 40, Country, 80s

has attributed to her success as a franchise owner.

On the Kinards, S.C., farm where she grew up, Allen said there were "horses, cows, pigs and the whole nine yards." She had chores to do every day before and after school.

"Growing up on a farm,

you learn to work hard and rely on your neighbors and family," she said. "You learn to do your chores, but to have fun every day, too."

She carried her work ethic into her career as a procurement agent, but eventually she found drawbacks to "working for the man."

That's where the East Coast Wings franchise came in. The owners of the original Winston-Salem location had been considering a franchise location, but they made the decision after Allen made a cold-call to the restaurant and asked if she could shadow the owners for a few days.

"They told me they couldn't believe I called because they were just considering a franchise branch," she said.

The result was Allen opening the first franchise location, loving her job and, of course, no longer living in a hotel room.

She said the mix of hard work and fun can be seen at the restaurant, which serves 75 flavors of hot wings.

"This is just a fun, energetic place to be with a variety of food," she said.