

Small-business owner sees exit plan develop perfectly



DAVID HENDRICKS

The future of his business had been in the back of the mind of Charles Parish of Parish Photography for several years.

Then one day, a couple of years ago at a business luncheon, he met Trinity University business graduate Jenna-Beth Lyde.

Parish now calls it a miracle. Lyde told him she wanted to

work at Parish Photography. He first said he couldn't afford her. She convinced him — and went in to modernize the studio from a financial and marketing standpoint while also becoming the second photographer.

Then a few months ago, Lyde became Parish's exit plan for his 48-year-old business.

With his own children pur-

suing other careers, Parish has given the studio to Lyde. On March 1, Parish Photography, a mainstay among Alamo Heights households for weddings and portraits, officially became Lyde's. Parish, 74, now works for her.

Lyde is 23, less than half the age of the business she just acquired. Photos from each decade adorn a wall at the busi-

ness at 7701 Broadway.

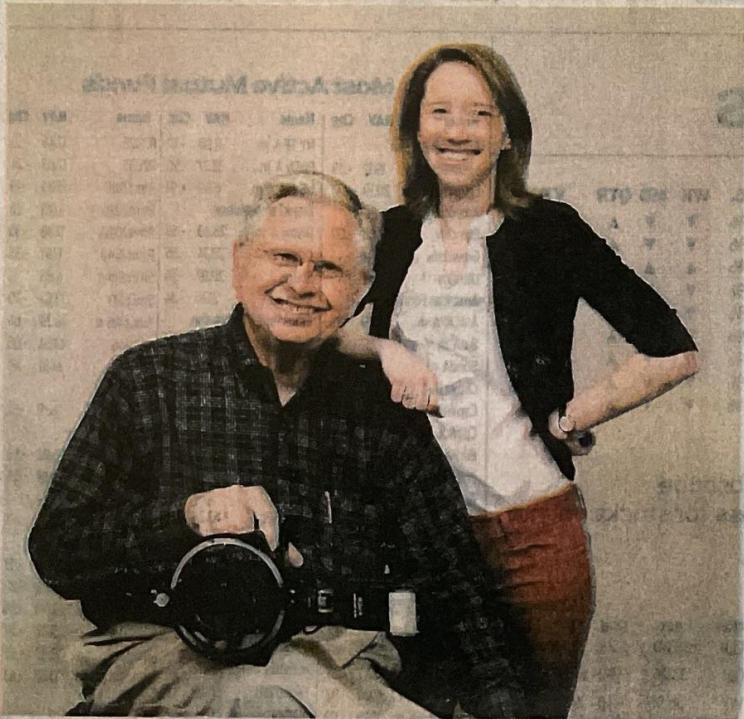
"There's a lot pressure to maintain its reputation," she said. Lyde intends to keep the Parish name. "In its heyday, it was a household name," she said.

A native of McAllen, Lyde has, in the words of Parish, rejuvenated the studio by jumping into social-media

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Courtesy Photo

Charles Parish of Parish Photography has transferred ownership of the studio to Jenna-Beth Lyde.

marketing, issuing email newsletters and updating the Internet site. Parish now writes an entertaining blog on the website, discussing the changes in the wedding photography business and recalling anecdotes from weddings long ago.

One of those changes was the shift to digital.

Parish remembers exactly when it occurred. He had been hired to photograph parts of President George W. Bush's 2001 inaugural ceremonies in Washington. Other photographers kept asking him, "Why do you still use film?"

"I changed overnight," he said.

A dozen other photographers have worked for Parish over the years. Nearly all of them left to start their own studios after they learned the trade. The ones who didn't keep up with technology have disappeared, he said. But many other photographers have sprung up with digital, computerized technology.

"When I went into business, there were only six or seven other photographers in the phone book," Parish said. "Now there are 300 in the phone book."

Wedding photography may seem repetitive to some people, but Parish's blog makes it clear that all kinds of drama

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occurs at weddings. He once helped serve Communion when the church minister was short-handed. Decades ago, Parish had to inform a bride, as the ceremony was starting, that the groom had just driven away in his car.

Parish is widely known around Alamo Heights because he belonged to everything from the Rotary Club to the San Antonio Country Club.

His wife, Betty, still operates a wedding planning service in an adjoining office, but many couples arrive having already hired a photographer. That helped persuade Parish that his marketing needed to change, and Lyde took on that challenge.

Under their agreement, Lyde will pay Parish's salary for at least the next three years. "He gets to do whatever he wants," she said laughing.

When it comes to an exit plan for a small-business owner, no one can have it better.

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