

# “Father of the Virtual Office Concept”

**Reuben DeTiege reigns as an innovator and trusted advisor to the small business community**

*By Dean M. Shapiro*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF REUBEN DETIEGE

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**I**n New Orleans there are thousands of small businesses, ranging from those that occupy brick and mortar facilities employing dozens of people to those individuals who operate sole proprietorships and work out of their homes. Although the focal points of these small businesses may vary widely they all have one thing in common: ambitious people behind them who nurture a dream of running their own operation and being successful at it.

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Reuben J. DeTiege II is one of those ambitious sole proprietors but he is even more than that. He is also an innovator and a respected small business consultant and advisor; a mentor to those just starting out on their own ventures.

As he explained during a recent interview, “I tell people, ‘The way to financial freedom is not going to be with a job. It’s going to be working your own business.’ I’ve done that for years.”

This philosophy and sound business sense, acquired over several decades of experiences in various types of enterprises, has given Reuben the skills necessary to share his advice with other aspiring entrepreneurs. His online consulting firm, SmallBusinessNOLA, gets plenty of hits on Facebook and its page is filled with success stories of those who followed their dreams of owning their own businesses.

“I put thousands of people in business,” Reuben proudly stated. “I got them started. I can point to a lot of successes



Reuben DeTiege, Adonis C. Expose, Terry Scott | PHOTO COURTESY OF REUBEN DETIEGE

and I'm proud of those who took my advice and succeeded."

Astutely monitoring changing trends in the business world, especially those changes made by major companies that reflect advancements in technology, Reuben perceived the need for new business models. He was able to foresee – nearly 20 years ago – that the time would

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**“Reuben is a good man. He works hard, he’s done a lot and he never complains. He is dedicated to the cause of making this community better.”**

*Ronald Coleman  
President, NAACP New Orleans Branch*

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come when it was no longer essential for office workers to “sit at a desk for eight hours a day in order to do their jobs.” Reading about how multinational corporations in the Far East and Western Europe were requiring employees to spend more time out in the field, he envisioned the same things being done here in the United States.

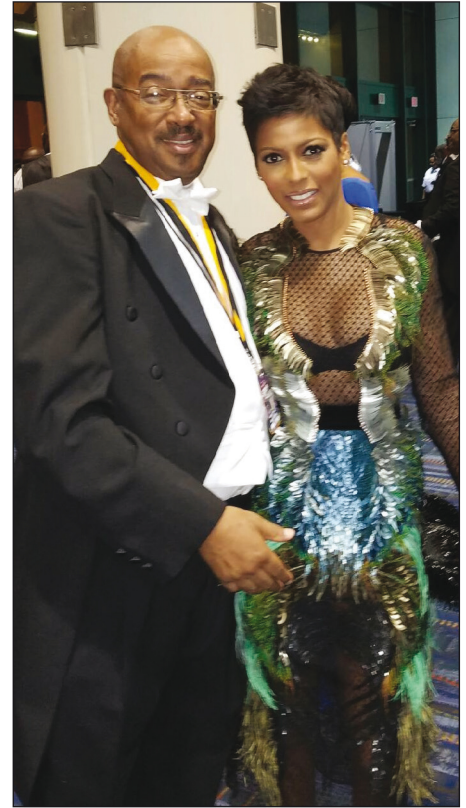
“They had these little pods out in the field and that’s where these people would go,” Reuben explained. “They’d have access to a fax machine, desktop computers and a printer and they’d get their jobs done there more quickly than if they had to do it over the phone from their offices.

“So I came up with this concept and it was kind of like a hybrid of what those other places were doing,” he continued.

Renting space in the New Orleans Regional Business Park in New Orleans East, Reuben used this European and Asian business model to set up the Virtual Office Suites Entrepreneurial Development Center, described as “a comprehensive, well-equipped business assistance center for small and emerging businesses.” The center was furnished with computers, printers, fax machines and featured conference rooms for conducting businesses. Renting the facility for \$99 a month, the center, at its peak, had 74 clients which was nearly three-fourths of its goal of 100. Regional Business Park Director Eugene Green served as a fiduciary agent for grants written by the center which raised about \$335,000.

In an article written about Reuben for the Small Business Exchange, he was hailed as “The Father of the Virtual Office Concept.” He was also the subject of favorable articles in nearly every New Orleans-based publication at that time.

However, the operation was interrupted by Hurricane Katrina which flooded the area and made the center inaccessible for nearly six months. By that time the remote workplace concept that Reuben introduced had taken root closer and more



Reuben DeTiege, Tamron Hall  
PHOTO COURTESY OF REUBEN DETIEGE

convenient to the New Orleans Central Business District. That’s when he knew it was time to move on and he did.

Once again, finding a unique niche for which there was no competition, Reuben founded a company that specialized in cleaning solar panels, A1 Solar Panel Cleaning Service, which he still runs today. “As far as I know right now, I am Louisiana’s only solar panel cleaning service,” he said. “I did the research and nobody else said they did it. So I’m pretty much the only game in town right now.”

In addition to this and his consulting business, Reuben is also the Economic Development Committee Chair for the New Orleans Branch of the NAACP, as well as a television producer at Access Television and the owner of a small internet gospel radio station, WSNB.

Additionally Reuben served as vice president of 100 Black Men, vice president of the Black MBAs Association and he is the Small Business Committee Chairman

for the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club with whom he also volunteers as a parade marshal for the Krewe of Zulu on Mardi Gras Day. He did consulting work for the former Good Work Network, founded and led by the recently deceased Phyllis Cassidy. He taught Management Information Systems for four years at Southern University at New Orleans and was active with the Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts when his two sons were members.

Growing up in the Carrollton area and the outlying neighborhoods of Gert Town and Hollygrove, Reuben attended private schools, including De La Salle and St. Augustine, before graduating from Alcee Fortier High School in 1976. He received his B.A. and his Master's, both in Business Administration.

Civic activism is in the DeTiege family bloodline. Reuben proudly related the saga of his grandfather, Mandeville L. DeTiege, a local icon of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s through the 1960s.

"He was the one who integrated City Park," Reuben said, recounting the sequence of events that led up to a landmark court decision. Mandeville L. DeTiege, a New Orleans barber who enjoyed playing golf, was chased off the course in City Park which was segregated at the time. He later volunteered to be arrested and he challenged the law in court, represented by renowned civil

rights attorney A.P. Tureaud. He lost the case but the lower court's decision was eventually overturned by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Today Reuben is proud of his four children ranging in age from 17 to 40. He has two sons, the youngest of whom plays football for St. Augustine, and two daughters who have followed their father's example and ventured into the world of small business.

Summing up his life and career, Reuben takes inspiration from some of the iconic figures of the Civil Rights Movement, including his grandfather. He quotes a saying from Benjamin Mays that proclaims, "The tragedy in life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach."

"I carry this quote around with me," Reuben said. "And, as I reflect on Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech I am reminded that, although we may have a long way to go in terms of realizing the kind of world he so eloquently described, this too is achievable. My theory always is, 'If you don't try you'll never know.'"

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Reuben DeTiege



Eugene Green, Reuben DeTiege



Reuben DeTiege

PHOTOS COURTESY OF REUBEN DETIEGE

**“ I’ve known Reuben since my days as the head of the Small and Emerging Business Development for the City of New Orleans and he is very focused. He recognizes that small and emerging businesses employ the vast majority of new jobs in our city and he does a great job in reaching out to them.”**

*Eugene J. Green Jr.*

*Former director of the Mayor's Office of Economic Development  
Former director of the New Orleans Regional Business Park*