



## After The Glory: Greg Jones



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By Jeff Rice, NN Senior Writer

[jrice@nittanynetwork.com](mailto:jrice@nittanynetwork.com)

*A Penn State football player is tough, smart, resourceful and driven. You have to be all of those things to succeed on the field, let alone survive four years with Joe Paterno. The Nittany Lions’ venerable leader and his assistants have always taken tremendous pride in preparing their players for the world after football as they prepare*

*them for the next opponent. The success stories go well beyond the players who went on to NFL stardom.*

*Today, NN begins a weekly series that tells some of these stories, beginning with Greg Jones, a burly defensive lineman in the late 1970s who is now a successful entrepreneur.*

Greg Jones saw the need probably because he had experienced it.

The former Penn State defensive tackle and Virginia-based businessman was looking for a new franchising opportunity a couple of years ago when his partners told him about a company called Bookkeeping Express, which helped small businesses balance and organize their finances, at the same time providing them with sound strategy.

“The reason why I loved it so much was that I’d been on that side of the fence – where do you turn for great outsource bookkeeping?” Jones said. “You can hunt and peck by referral, but most aren’t qualified. You could go the CPA route, but they don’t give you the attention. There’s a huge gap out there in the business community and I felt that years ago.”

BKE had been founded in 1984, but Jones and his business partners, Merritt Green and Bob Stocker, saw an opportunity to franchise the company and purchased it in late 2007.

They’ve since added 14 different franchisees in eight states, covering 116 territories that extend as far west as Las Vegas.

They’ve also opened four corporate locations in Virginia and Washington, D.C., which gives BKE more direct contact with some of

the 28 million small businesses in the United States with annual revenue streams of less than \$5 million.

“It allows us to communicate with the small-business community and get feedback,” said Jones, the chief executive officer of BKE. “We can learn from the owners themselves. We’re not just making gut decisions, we’re learning from the market.”

One of those initial lessons was how much of a need for bookkeeping exists in the months leading up to tax return time.

“Everybody started to gear up around the holiday,” Jones said.

“Businesses ignore their books, they get behind, they find themselves three, six, nine months behind in their accounting. The cleanup reconciliation process is good for us. It gives us a great runway to prove ourselves with them while we clean that up.”

Several businesses took a proactive approach shortly after filing their returns this spring.

“In mid-May it started to come back,” Jones said. “People were coming to us and saying, ‘I don’t want to go through that hell again.’”

Jones had gotten into franchising in 2001, when he and partner Jim Garrettson founded Garrettson-Jones Properties, which owns several Five Guys Burgers and Fries franchises in Florida and also develops real estate. Prior to becoming CEO of Bookkeeping Express, he was vice president of sales at both Cavalier Business Communications in Richmond, Va., and Fransmart, LLC, a franchise development company in Alexandria, Va.

Jones lettered for the Nittany Lions in 1979 and 1980 and received his degree in business in 1981. A team captain during his senior season in

1980, he was fourth on the squad with 53 tackles and helped Penn State to a 10-2 season and defeat of Ohio State in the Fiesta Bowl. His membership in the exclusive fraternity of former Nittany Lions is a frequent topic of discussion in his current line of work.

"I try not to bring it up. A lot of other people do," Jones said. "It comes up all the time. I don't avoid it; it's actually a very nice breaking of the ice in certain situations."

Jones still finds time to work out six days a week and spend time with his family – wife Cathy (a former Penn State swimmer) and three children. The rest of his hours are spent helping small businesses save time – and money.

"It's not a sexy business," he said, laughing. "But it is one that keeps on giving, and one that's not going away."