

# RIO TAN

**LOCATIONS:** 2  
**YEARS IN BUSINESS:** 3  
**TANNING SYSTEMS:** 19  
**EMPLOYEES:** 8  
**OTHER SERVICES:**  
SUNLESS TANNING

## “THE PERFECT JOB”

by John P. Ribner

Rio Tan is a career dream that became a reality, and the staff’s sunny attitude has helped this two-salon Alabama business succeed.

When Amy Bennefield decided to open Rio Tan in Hoover, AL, she used a recipe for success that called for equal parts customer service, quality tanning equipment and solid partnerships. It would appear she chose wisely; a year later, the salon was so popular with area tanners that she opened a second one in nearby McCalla. Amy is happy with the success of her two-store chain, and she’s not planning to expand it anytime soon; but that doesn’t mean that she doesn’t have plans for future growth.

## MOTHER KNOWS BEST

Amy Bennefield always wanted “the perfect job.” She pursued a career in sales while attending law school; but upon graduation, she realized she didn’t want to be a lawyer because it would require too much time away from her family. If that weren’t enough, recent changes at her company made her day job less enjoyable. She was definitely in a pickle, and it was her mother, Mari Morrison, who helped Amy see her way out of it. “I agreed to meet my mother for dinner after my tanning session at an area salon, but when I got there, I had to wait 45 minutes for a 15-minute tan,” said Amy. “I was explaining to my mother why I was late for dinner, and she said that maybe my perfect job was right in front of my eyes. She said owning a tanning salon would allow me to be my own boss, interact with people and have fun.” Amy admits to being skeptical about the idea, at first, but the more she thought about it, the more it made sense.



Amy Bennefield divides her time between running her salons & raising 16-month old twins – Jackson & Mari Beth – with her husband, Chuck.

## PARTNERING UP

Intrigued by the possibility of owning a salon, Amy began researching the indoor tanning industry. Through this research, she met Blake Kumler, a sales representative at ETS Tan, who would end up being instrumental in her career change. “Being an indoor tanner and knowing how to operate a tanning salon are two different things, and Blake was a big help in explaining things to me and taking me through the process,” she said. “After offering lots of tips and practical ideas, he proved to me that a salon would be a very profitable business venture. I was also blown away by ETS’ equipment and the level of customer service that Blake offered.” After reaching what she describes as the “breaking point” at her former job, Amy enlisted her mother’s help and together, the two ladies found the perfect location in the suburb of Hoover. After signing the lease in October and going to work on the retail space, Rio Tan opened for business on February 1, 2006.

The original Rio Tan salon has eight tanning units – three ETS Sun Star 332 sunbeds, an ETS Starpower 548, an ETS Solar Force 648, an ETS Solar Force stand-up, a Soleil Systems Sol Lux 40-3, and a MagicTan sunless spray booth. Rio Tan salons sell products by Designer Skin and Devoted Creations, and utilize Helios salon software. While lotions and equipment help keep Rio Tan’s clients looking good, Amy says it’s her staff that truly keeps the business going. “I have the best group of employees I could ever ask for,” she said. “They are all hardworking, trustworthy, and a big reason why the business is successful. Everyone on the team goes above and beyond what is expected of them, and I really couldn’t do this without them.”

## LET’S GO FOR TWO!

Less than two years after opening her first Rio Tan salon, Amy decided it was time to become a chain. “I had talked with other salon owners, both online and at industry events, and one thing I kept hearing was that I’d need multiple locations if I really want to be successful,” she said. “It helps with branding the business and getting your name out in the community. After giving it much thought, I decided to do it.” Amy’s second Rio Tan salon ended up being a birthday present to herself when she opened it on August 21, 2008, her 30th birthday. The business is located in the suburb of McCalla, AL, roughly 10 miles from her original store. It has 10 ETS Tan tanning units – three Sun Star 332 sunbeds, two Solaris 442, two Star Power, a Solar Force 648, a Solar Force stand-up and an SS 755. The salon also offers a VersaSpa sunless spray booth by MagicTan, and its Tan Walls modular wall systems give it a unique look. “We’ve also added lotions by MR International at our second location,” Amy said.

## KEYWORD: FRIENDLY

In no uncertain terms, Amy says she knows what’s made her Rio Tan salons successful, and that’s customer service. “We send direct mail and e-mails to our client database and advertise on the radio to help get our name out there, and all of these methods have been effective,” she said. “I believe our biggest strength, though, is our level of customer service. Everyone here does their best to make our clients feel at home when they come to tan. This has resulted in many of them

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**SUPER STAFF!** Rio Tan Owner, Amy Bennefeld, credits her hardworking, trustworthy team with keeping the business running smoothly. (L-R) Karlie Hyche, Tonya Rainey, Amy Bennefeld, Katie Cain & Kristina McSwain.



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"I believe our biggest strength is our level of customer service. Everyone here does their best to make our clients feel at home when they come to tan."

-Amy Bennefield, Rio Tan Owner

referring their friends and family to us." Amy has implemented a referral program that rewards clients with a free sunless or upgrade-level tanning session and discounts on their next lotion purchase for every new client they refer.

## EXPANSION PLANS

Looking ahead, Amy has certainly thought about opening a third Rio Tan location, but she's not ready to do that just yet. She still has some unfinished business to take care of. "After we completed our first store, I always wished we'd made it bigger," she said. "I've decided that I would rather expand the first store before thinking about opening another. We've spoken to the leasing agents about purchasing another 1,200 square feet of space on one side of us, and we're still involved in that process. My main concern is being able to stay up and running while this construction goes on during peak season." When the expansion is complete, the original Rio Tan store will have an additional six to eight ETS tanning systems. "I'm strongly considering a high-pressure unit because I think it's something that the tanners around here will be interested in," Amy said.

Amy always wanted a career that was fun, enjoyable and allowed her to spend time with her family. She found all this and more in salon ownership, and is very happy with her decision. "I look forward to going to work every morning and seeing all our clients and the many friends I've made through owning the salon," she said. "I also enjoy this job because of the flexibility it gives me. My husband Chuck and I have 15-month-old twins – Jackson and Mari Beth – and it's easier to schedule my time in the salon around their needs. For me, it's the perfect job!" ■