

# OXFORD BANK SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

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Every local business has a story worth sharing with the community. That is the belief behind Oxford Bank’s “Business Spotlight” series – to shine spotlight on all of our favorite local businesses and connect businesses with their surrounding communities.

This month’s spotlight is Ergo Sleep Center, located in Royal Oak, Michigan. I sat down with the owner and founder, Wendell “Alan” Martens, to discuss his business.

**Amanda Wilcox:** What inspired you to start your business?

**AM:** I owned closed-door pharmacies — I had pharmacies from Salt Lake City to Tucson. I was ranked 12th in the nation at one point and time. These were compound prescriptions for hospitals and for patients as they were being discharged. At one point, I was getting calls from doctors and patients asking for help in creating something for patients who were going through chemotherapy to sleep on — at the time, there wasn’t anything in the market for this demographic. I developed a mattress topper to help relieve the issues for these patients.

When the pharmacy company I owned was acquired, I took the mattress foam topper idea with me and began to develop the Ergo Sleep Center. This is my 27th year designing beds now. I have been designing beds to help with chronic back pain, sensitive joint issues, heart and circulation issues, acid reflux issues, people with sleep apnea . . . the list goes on. I work to design beds to make people’s sleep more comfortable.

**AW:** What products/services do you sell?

**AM:** I sell retail beds that are ergonomically correct and symptom-specific for individuals with chronic issues. One out of every three people who sleep on store-bought mattresses have back issues; 18 million people suffer from sleep apnea in the U.S. I can help them sleep better and relieve back pain with the mattresses I’ve created. I know my competitors, and I can explain to you what our mattresses can do to help you sleep better than the big box stores.



Martens, showing off one of his adjustable-frame beds

Out of my 27 years in the industry, I’ve had only one return in 5 years. People don’t bring their mattress back, and they don’t complain about my mattresses. They’re meant to solve problems and make people’s lives better.

Sleep can change someone’s life. I have a 15-year warranty on the mattresses I make, but my customers only come to get a new mattress much longer after those 15 years. I’ve even helped a customer change the mattress they bought from me after they had a serious medical change, so they wouldn’t have to buy a new one.

We also do massage chairs, therapy chairs, and therapy products. Helping people is my passion.

**AW:** What’s the one thing your business is known for, over your competitors? Why are you known for that?

**AM:** The product we have created uses a type of foam that will not break down, and is not affected by temperature. The top layer of our mattresses is called Ergo XcelGel, which I own the rights to. It is even used in hospitals for



Alan Martens in his store, Ergo Sleep Center

patients that are coming out of transplant surgery because it absorbs heat and relieves pressure better than any other mattress product out there. This portion alone helps separate our mattress from any of our competition.

**AW:** What has been your business' proudest moment? Why?

**AM:** We got a call from one of my dealers in Maine that they were transferring a patient with Multiple Sclerosis, and wanted to know if I'd deliver a bed. I took my then eight year-old daughter with me. She was helping me set up the bed and the woman came in and had tears in her eyes and was so happy with what we had been able to do for her. My daughter asked the woman why she was crying, and she told her "I'll finally be able to sleep and exercise again because I'll feel better." My daughter and I left and she told me "Daddy, I know why you do this now." To be able to show my daughter the impact we have on people's everyday lives and how important sleep is for every single person was truly a proud moment for me.

**AW:** What has been the biggest risk you ever took for your business? What was it, what could have gone wrong, and what was the end result?

**AM:** I've had stores in malls and storefronts, with only walk-in clients and word-of-mouth advertising, which was a risk. Our product is self-selling. A customer would come in to a mall and shop, and never plan to purchase a mattress. But they would come into my store and lay on a mattress, and walk out purchasing a new sleep system. I would have new inventory coming in every 45 days and move it consistently. I still do. My next step is to sell on the internet; it's a risk to invest in the marketing and move the inventory, but I know we will continue to be successful.



Ergo Sleep Center Show Room

**AW:** Tell us something interesting/fun about your business.

**AM:** The mattresses are designed to be ergonomic and symptom specific. I have people that have heat issues or fibromyalgia, and there is a mattress to help with that. I have a mattress that helps with the lumbar support but also helps with sleep apnea and acid reflux. The adjustable bases along with the mattress itself can create a totally different sleep experience than anyone else can.

**AW:** What's the most popular product that you sell?

**AM:** It's called 'The Solution;' this is a mattress for someone with more chronic back issues. I sell the mattress alone at home shows, but most people purchase the mattress and the mechanical base. It is the best selling mattress I have, and people testify how great it is. I even have had people stand up at sleep conferences and tell a room full of people how great the mattress is! It's truly a testimony to what we can do to help people and how important sleep is for every single person!



Martens and Wilcox, testing out the mattresses

## Ergo Sleep Center

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Mon—Sat: 11am-6pm, or by appointment