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## Backstory

# Backstory: Entrepreneur diversifies business by penning book

By Virginia Bridges

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John Quintero owns South by North Strategies, a Chapel Hill-based research firm that opened in 2009 and specializes in economic and social policy.

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- Advice from John Quintero
  - Put a lot of thought into your decision to open a business, and really think about how this fits with all of your priorities in your life.
  - Think through as much as you can in advance so you can know what you want to accomplish and be able to respond when you face unforeseen challenges.

CHAPEL HILL — John Quintero describes his pending book release as the icing on his small business cake.

“It would be a little bit of extra money that would help to pay for expenses and contribute to the organization, but it’s not going to take the place of the core work,” said the owner of South by North Strategies, a Chapel Hill-based research firm that specializes in economic and social policy.

The company provides analytical services to mission, social and public sector organizations that are seeking to understand a particular set of issues, Quintero said.

Quintero, 37, said he never envisioned himself as an entrepreneur. But that changed in 2009 when he didn’t see an opportunity to move ahead as a research associate at the N.C. Budget and Tax Center, he said, and a job search didn’t yield any appealing alternatives.

However, people he had worked with on previous projects and others he met while interviewing indicated that if he opened his own firm, they would be interested in working with him. So that same year, he founded South by North Strategies.

Since then, his projects have included exploring the role of rural employment security offices in the state for the U.S. Department of Labor, and a report for a New York-based research and advocacy group looking at changes in public investment in public colleges and universities.

South by North Strategies handles up to 12 projects annually. The cost of services ranges from \$5,000 to \$60,000.

As various nonprofit, private and public agencies are scaling back or closing due to a reduction of funding, Quintero is pursuing opportunities to diversify his company’s services and client base.

Quintero said his book sets the stage for that transition. New York academic publisher M.E. Sharpe plans to release “Running the Numbers: A Practical Guide to Regional Economic and Social Analysis” this month, Quintero said.

The book, he said, was an extension of the work he was already doing.

After starting his business, Quintero found himself explaining again and again how to use existing information, such as U.S. Census Bureau data, in an objective and efficient way, he said.

In the summer of 2010, Quintero started drafting chapters during gaps in projects. He finished his first draft at the end of 2011 and shared it with his former professors at UNC-Chapel Hill, where he received a master’s degree in public administration in 2002.

“I got a lot of positive feedback,” he said. In early 2012, Quintero submitted application packages to three academic publishers.

“One I never heard from. One was interested with reservations, and the third one was very interested,” he said. Quintero signed a contract with that company, M.E. Sharpe, in September 2012 and submitted his final manuscript in April.

The book will bring “modest revenue,” help build his credibility, and open the door to providing training services for individuals and organizations.

After the holidays, Quintero plans to research and identify needs and opportunities, and “start figuring out how to position it,” he said.

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