

— BUSINESS — INTERVIEW



Griffin McNeill, Vice President of The Starke Agency–Auburn, pictured with the Opelika Chamber of Commerce staff.

THE STARKE AGENCY

100 YEARS OF SERVICE, NOW GROWING IN EAST ALABAMA

As The Starke Agency approaches its 100th year in business, its reputation for integrity, trust, and personal service is as strong as ever—now with a growing presence right here in East Alabama. The agency was family-owned until 2022, when ownership transitioned to four longtime producers within the firm. This change ushered in a new era of intentional growth, built on the same relationship-driven foundation that has defined Starke for generations.

In 2023, East Alabama became the target of a strategic expansion, with the agency officially opening its Auburn office on East University Drive in November. Griffin McNeill, Vice President of the Auburn location, was the first to put "boots on the ground" in early 2023. Since then, he has helped lead the charge in connecting The Starke Agency with the people and businesses of Auburn, Opelika, and beyond.

The Starke Agency wasn't just looking to grow—they were looking to grow with purpose. "We're in a great community that really values relationships and trust," said McNeill. "We're not a transactional business. We really want to partner with our clients and grow with them."

As an independent insurance brokerage, The Starke Agency offers clients something different from the one-size-fits-all approach of national carriers. Rather than representing a single company like State Farm or Allstate, Starke represents a wide range of insurance carriers, allowing them to shop around on behalf of the client to find the best coverage at the right price. This flexibility enables them to build custom insurance programs tailored to the needs of each client—whether it's a startup, a growing enterprise, or an individual with complex assets.

While they offer both personal and commercial lines, the agency's business is primarily commercial. Their expertise spans property, liability, workers' compensation, commercial auto, and more, with a special focus on businesses managing complex risks or experiencing growth. "Where we really add value to clients is from the commercial space," said McNeill. "When you are constantly in contract negotiations or working with financial institutions, you have to have insurance in place to make those things happen."

In early 2024, The Starke Agency solidified its local presence by merging with The University Agency, bringing long-time insurance professionals like Myra Johnson, Cecil Yarbrough, Yvette Biglow and Leanna Griggs on board. With decades of experience and strong community ties, they added both depth and continuity to Starke's growing East Alabama operation.

When asked what sets The Starke Agency apart from other brokerages, McNeill was clear: it's their ability to offer big-agency resources with small-agency care. Despite being one of the top 10 independent insurance agencies in Alabama, The Starke Agency maintains a personal approach. "We feel like a small shop, but we can do big shop things," McNeill said. "We're here in Montgomery and in Auburn and in Opelika and we're really proud about that."

For new or established businesses, McNeill emphasizes that the first step is simply reaching out to figure out your insurance needs. "Let's have a conversation," he said. "Even if it's not a right fit now, right? It could be in the future."

As The Starke Agency looks ahead to its 100th anniversary, its legacy of trust and service is only gaining momentum in East Alabama. With deep community roots, decades of expertise, and a commitment to personalized support, their team is poised to serve as a long-term partner to local businesses and families.