

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF THE
ENTREPRENEURSHIP HALL OF FAME

Profiles in ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP



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A. HAMID ANDALIB

Drive to Achieve



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That drive to achieve has led Andalib to become a serial entrepreneur, starting multiple businesses and, at every step along the way, giving back to his community.

Andalib arrived in the U.S. in 1979 at the age of 17 to enroll at Georgia Tech. Speaking no English on his arrival, he spent the first few months of his college education in English language classes, to prepare him for the classroom the following semester. He then transferred to Atlanta Metro University for about a year, because the cost was much more affordable, and then landed a scholarship from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to study engineering.

When not studying at UTC, Andalib worked as a waiter at popular eatery The Loft. In 1985 at the age of 24, he graduated with an engineering degree and was approached by The Loft's owners about buying the restaurant. He and a partner

secured an SBA-funded loan and took ownership, with Andalib becoming the general manager.

Wanting to learn more about the lending process, Andalib then enrolled in a commercial banking certificate program at Vanderbilt University. On completion, he started AHA Capital, a commercial lending company.

That business then led Andalib into the co-branded credit card business, creating one of the nation's first co-branded credit cards for The Loft, followed by Olan Mills Portrait Studios, Wolf Camera, and Nevada Bob's Golf, among others. The drive behind the credit cards, however, was as a fundraising tool.

Recognizing the value of providing a gift card as a gift or reward, Andalib formed VIPGift.com in 2000. VIPGift cards could be given as an incentive to make a purchase and allow the recipient to spend the value on a wide range of products. It is a multi-platform incentive tool with retailers ranging from Dell to AT&T, UPS and others. Andalib sold it in 2008 to a Silicon Valley venture.

Since then he's taken the incentive tool idea and migrated into other industries, with EnergyEarth. At the EnergyEarth website, customers can purchase energy efficient products and redeem rewards earned through other loyalty

programs. The inspiration for EnergyEarth came from Andalib's interest in sustainability.

Asking the question, "How could that be done better?" is what has driven a number of Andalib's ventures throughout his career. He looks for opportunities to solve problems and turns them into profitable businesses, he says.

But he says, "Success is just a byproduct of doing the right thing."

For doing the right thing consistently, he has earned numerous awards and accolades, from the

Chamber of Commerce and Blue Chip Enterprise Business Person of the Year Award, Circle of Hope Award from the Arthritis Foundation, and the Outstanding Young Tennessean by the U.S. Jaycees.

Fortunately, Andalib indicates he's not done making a difference and remains dedicated to his journey from success to significance through serving his employees, community and the less fortunate. ■