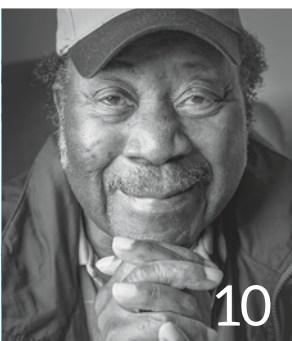


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On the cover: Computer science professor and I3S Director Karl Ricanek Jr. is leading the way in facial recognition technology.

Photo by Jeff Janowski/UNCW



East Coast Gardens of Eden

Brandon Mckeown '09 (left) and **Thurston Pope '07, '18M** never imagined a 2013 trip to Southern California would set them off on a journey to start their own business.

"We stumbled upon a unique local floral studio on Sunset Boulevard," said Pope. "Out front was a rustic cart full of succulents; we were immediately intrigued. Later that day the lightbulb went off: 'Why couldn't we do something like this in North Carolina?'" With that thought, The Coastal Succulent was born.

Mckeown and Pope knew the succulent trend was gaining momentum, but mixing cacti and succulents with rocks, sand and moss wasn't a common style of gardening. By combining succulents with materials native to North Carolina, they were able to fuse Pacific coast plants with Atlantic coast flair.

Though they had no formal business training, Mckeown and Pope started small and debuted their products at the Ocean Isle Beach Oyster Festival the following October, nearly selling out of everything they brought. "We realized what we originally thought may be a hobby could be something much bigger," said Pope. "We've learned to take it day by day, gaining experience through trial and error."

The company continues to grow, recently launching its online store and venturing into do-it-yourself terrarium kits and home décor. In addition, the company has become active on the wedding scene, formed partnerships with local venues, and expanded throughout the state with its largest client, Whole Foods Market.

"Business ownership can be very rewarding," said Pope. "Good work ethic, creativity and passion will take you far."

– Matt Stephenson '20M

