

Home based:

Entrepreneurs find satisfaction with their own businesses

For years, Sue Lunnemann worked for her father, first as a receptionist and then as an office manager. But when her dad sold his business, the Kirkwood resident had to find an alternative income and started thinking like an entrepreneur. She took a part-time job at a public accounting firm to pay the bills and to allow time for research and networking. In 1997, Lunnemann founded Solutions Financial and Consulting Services, a general book-keeping firm operated from her home office.

"I wanted to make enough money to pay the bills," Lunnemann said. "That might be one of the downfalls, that I didn't set specific goals for myself. If I had really set specific goals, I might be making more money."

It took about 15 months before she began generating revenue, during which she maintained her part-time job for stable income. Today, she says she is living adequately and making more money than she would by working for others.

A common obstacle Lunnemann and other women face is convincing family, friends and potential clients that a home-based business is a real and serious business.

"I had a clear understanding of what I was going to have to do, but my friends and family didn't," Lunnemann said. "My friends and relatives would call during the day to chit-chat and ask me to go out to lunch. I kind of had to acclimate them to the fact that this is my real job."

In addition to being taken seriously, finding the balance between work and home responsibilities also can be a challenge for female, home-based business owners.

"Frequently women are both the child-care and household managers, so establishing balance between managing home and worklife is a challenge," said Denise Lee, owner of Clear Spaces and mother of two. "When you go off to a nine-to-five job in another area, everything is contained. When you work from home, the boundaries bleed a little bit."

Lee, a Brentwood resident, established the organizational company in 2005 after a history of careers in social services and information technology. Lee said having your work or office in your home does make it tempting to do household duties such as throwing in a load of laundry, walking the dog and putting dinner in the crockpot.

Not having to leave home and report to the corporate world also has its perks, including flexible hours. According to some female, home-based business owners, this is one of the most valuable benefits.

Nine years ago, Pat McIlvaine founded Common Sense Business Solutions to help small businesses, including home-based business, get organized and create a plan. She says although flexibility is a plus, it is important for home-based business owners to designate a certain part of the day to work.

"You have to set regular business hours and take your lunch break, or you'll never get anything done or make any money," said McIlvaine, recipient of the Home Based Business Advocate of the Year Award in 2002.

The North County resident says designating a part of the house as an office and dressing as if going to

work also helps to get into the correct mindset. While she did give up the panty hose, she says pajamas definitely are out and advises dressing better than you would to run errands on the weekend.

Although the garage is traditionally seen as the man's territory, Sandy Schulz of Chesterfield found it to be the perfect workspace for her home-based business. Eight years ago, after her children had graduated from college, Schulz set a goal to own a pottery business by the time she turned 50. After 25 years of creating pottery as a hobby, Schulz pursued decorative pottery as an occupation. She will celebrate the milestone birthday next May as the proud owner of Earth and Wheel Pottery.

"The first year was difficult in finding my niche in the St. Louis market," Schulz said. "You say you're a potter, but you have to try different things such as ceremonial, functional or decorative pottery."

In the early years of her business, on special occasions and holidays, Schulz asked her husband for supplies or equipment to help her grow. Today she and her husband use the income generated from the business as extra money that allows them to take better vacations.

While there are no statistics specifically for female, home-based businesses, the Center for Women's Business Research estimates that as of 2006, there were 210,000 privately held Missouri firms that were owned 50 percent or greater by women. These businesses generated nearly \$42 billion in sales and provided employment for 297,486 people last year.

Hollyberry Baking Co. is an example, grossing half a million dollars in 2006. Starting from her Webster Groves home and the Knights of Columbus in Webster, Holly Cunningham transformed her baking hobby into a successful company that recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Upon quitting her job as a sales representative, Cunningham says she wanted to continue working, but she wanted to do something that would enable her to have a family and set aside money for them.

"I had three major goals: to start something that would give me more time to spend with family; more money to be able to give to church and charity; and be really proud of so that I could sell it in the future," said Cunningham, mother of twins.

Today Hollyberry specializes in gourmet gifts and catering, accented by their made-from-scratch sweets. Some of those sweets can even be found at Straub's as of this month.

In respect to other women considering starting their own business, Cunningham said, "You will work harder than you could ever imagine, think about it more than you ever want to think about it and have to work hard to balance time with family and friends."

You can contact Kelly McCann at kmccann@yourjournal.com.

Small-business resources

Home Based Women Entrepreneurs

www.hbwe.org

National Association of Women Business Owners

www.nawbo.org

Center for Women's Business Research

www.cfwbr.org

National Women's Business Council

www.nwbc.gov

Small Business Administration

www.sba.gov

Small Business Television

www.sbtv.com