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Valerie Sprague success story, Blue Moon Estate Sales of Jacksonville – May 2023

By Lorrie DeFrank

With a lot of support from the Jacksonville Women’s Business Center, Valerie Sprague is turning one of her favorite hobbies into a rewarding business. Owner of Blue Moon Estate Sales of Jacksonville, “she helps people sell their possessions in situations involving downsizing, relocation, retirement and the passing of a loved one.”

“Shopping estate sales was my fun way to get out of the house and be around people. I got to know the community of shoppers. You never knew what treasures you would find,” she said of the service she now offers to others.

While moving often with her husband’s job, Sprague worked for more than 20 years in software development and database management from her home office. In early 2021 she began working with a business coach on her dream to become an entrepreneur. Aware of her

hobby, he suggested an estate sale franchise. “Is it Blue Moon?” she replied, remembering shopping their sales in Raleigh, North Carolina. “That was a full circle moment.”

She began working with the franchisors’ sales team and by the end of 2021 had become an owner and acquired two territories stretching from Orange Park to Amelia Island to Nocatee. She had her first sale in early 2022, the same time she became involved with JWBC, which she discovered online.

“From all the years of being a customer, I knew what the customer experience should be like,” Sprague said. But she didn’t know the particulars of running her own business.

“I can’t say enough wonderful things about everyone at JWBC. I am an introverted personality. During my 20 years in IT, I was not out networking and didn’t know where to begin. I loved the learning opportunities and resources of JWBC,” she said. “My world shrank from working at home and they helped boost my confidence with things like being comfortable speaking out. It’s been a huge journey of personal growth, as well.”

Sprague took advantage of many JWBC programs, most notably completing its Entrepreneur Certificate Program by participating in four of its five programs, in her case: Venture Leadership, Customer Development, Financial Matters and Marketing Matters.

“I found pearls of wisdom in all of them, whether run by JWBC or outside speakers,” said Sprague, who is using that information to build her brand and manage her team of 14 employees.

She joined the JWBC Society of Small Businesses, which she recalls hosting the first networking event she attended. Soon she was invited to join JWBC’s St. Johns County Success Circle facilitated by Joan Bonnette. “That is an incredible, safe space with other business owners, where we talk about our challenges and celebrate our successes together,” Sprague said. “I leave those monthly meetings feeling

uplifted. I am honored to hear feedback from women who have had years and years of running their businesses.”

Sprague is currently participating in Cohort 18 of JAX Bridges, JAX Chambers’ entrepreneurial growth program for small businesses. She praised it for helping her scale and grow her business, and for making her feel comfortable with public speaking. “I found that I was volunteering to get up and talk,” she said. “I’ve gotten past some of the fears I had.”

This early in her new career, Sprague measures success by comparing the number of her estate sales this year to last, increases in average sale revenue, and adding staffing to be able to run multiple sales on weekends. “My goal this year is to double revenue of last year,” she said. In addition to enhancing her website and other marketing tips she picked up from JWBC, she receives referrals from neighbors, Realtors, estate attorneys and wealth managers.

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