



Christina Singleton success story, The Neat Squad – 2023

By Lorrie DeFrank

Helping people declutter their homes and digitize and preserve their photos and videos, Christina Singleton enjoys the personal satisfaction she gets from her successful entrepreneurship. Her business, The Neat Squad, also offers custom closets and pantries.

When she graduated from college with a degree in education 16 years ago, a hiring freeze on teachers led to her becoming a Certified Underground Contractor, doing project management and learning how to run her parents' contracting business in South Florida. After that, she moved to Jacksonville and taught middle school math for 10 years but discovered that wasn't to be her niche, either. "Teaching has really changed a lot. The mental health of teachers has been impacted in a negative way," said the self-proclaimed overachiever. "I ended up decluttering and downsizing in my personal life, and that really started to improve my mental health."

Coming across The Photo Managers and National Association of Productivity and Organizing, Singleton said she found her destiny. Not only did it satisfy her passion for working with pictures, but also she was drawn to the idea of a career that would make other people feel good, too. She became a Certified Professional Organizer and Certified Photo Organizer by taking numerous courses and completing the organizations' extensive requirements that included vigorous testing, over 1,500 hours of paid organizing and lots of reading about best practices.

The Neat Squad's built-in closet, pantry and garage systems include disassembling old shelving, installing the new units, and replacing and organizing customers' items.

Singleton started her business in March 2021 and built a website that showcased her services. She immediately began searching for a group of women business owners to network with. Within four months she found the Jacksonville Women's Business Center, which she credits with pulling her out of her introverted shell and connecting her with women who offered the strong support she needed.

"I was terrified," she recalled of walking into her first networking event at a cupcake business, "but the women were so welcoming. They made me want to come back and think I can do this."

She wasted no time embarking on JWBC's Entrepreneurial Certificate Program, which she completed this year and was recognized at JWBC's Leadership Awards event for taking all five of its courses—Financial Matters, Marketing Matters, Venture Leadership, Customer Development and Legal Matters.

"I learned something in every single class," said Singleton, sharing that her weak leadership skills were significantly sharpened by her coaching in Venture Leadership. Although she had previously created a business plan, Customer Development built upon it with activities such as customer surveys and client feedback.

In Marketing Matters she learned the importance of being consistent with branding. Her logo had evolved over the years so she hired a company she learned of through JWBC to rebrand her business—validating the success of networking. Because of JWBC, she got involved with several other networking groups and became more involved in the community, said Singleton, who serves as hospitality chair on the board of

the Women Business Owners of North Florida and is the Southeast regional leader for The Photo Managers.

Next, she was accepted into Cohort 17 of JAX Bridges, a comprehensive entrepreneurial program of JAX Chamber. In addition to reinforcing the business practices of the Entrepreneurial Certificate Program, it enhanced her professional development. “My biggest takeaway was finding my voice,” she said. “JAX Bridges forced me to get up in front of the room and pitch my business, which was terrifying.”

The positive results are evident in the consistent growth of The Neat Squad, which has two employees in addition to the owner and serves clients from Jacksonville to St. Augustine.

“The biggest benefit JWBC provides is a community,” said Singleton, who is contemplating giving back by collaborating on teaching a class. “You feel alone being a small business owner and it’s nice to have other people to bounce ideas off of, understand what you are going through, and celebrate your achievements.”

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