

Hope Gets a Makeover

Jeanine Ferguson, Hope Greetings

Jeanine Ferguson got the idea for Hope Greetings in the middle of a large crowd at her uncle's funeral. Her bereaved aunt was seated a few rows ahead of Jeanine, distraught and without a tissue to wipe her tears. Jeanine couldn't help at the time, but she conceived a clear vision of what she wished she could offer: a fresh handkerchief with a message of hope and comfort.

In 2008, she launched Hope Greetings, a venture that sells products wholesale to the funeral home industry and online to individuals. The company produces handkerchiefs and paper tissue packaging designed with inspirational scriptures and other encouraging quotations. The products can also be customized with the funeral home brand or an image of the deceased. Jeanine balanced her fledgling business with a young family and her fast-paced marketing career in medical device sales until a career change gave her some time in 2014 to invest in branding and creating a marketing strategy.

She enrolled in Marketing Matters, a mentoring program offered by the Jacksonville Women's Business Center (JWBC), in January of 2014. Marketing Matters is an intensive, six-month program that pairs a woman business owner with two marketing professionals. The business owner attends several strategy workshops with other owners, and creates a comprehensive brand strategy with the help of her mentors. Volunteer facilitator Amy Calfee, owner of Temerity Creative, LLC, designed the program to lead business owners through the process of defining their brand and understanding their customers to create a marketing plan that is manageable, sustainable, and measurable.

"Jeanine came in with the right attitude," says Calfee. "Wide open and ready to learn." Together with Pat Blanchard, JWBC Director and program administrator, Calfee paired Jeanine with two strong mentors: Janell Conner, who owns Public Design Unit, a full service marketing design firm, and Jamie Thomas, an experienced marketing professional and partner at LBA Group, a Jacksonville CPA firm. Thomas has been recognized as the 2013 Accounting Marketer of the Year by the CPA Practice Management Forum and as one of the Top 100 Most Influential in the Accounting Profession by Accounting Today Magazine. The mentoring team met at least once a month (the commitment is for two hours a month for each mentor) and provided support, advice and encouragement through dozens of emails and phone calls. Amy Calfee spent time on the phone with Jeanine the night before she left to attend a funeral home trade show, giving her "the best advice ever," according to Jeanine: "Don't spend one minute behind your exhibit table; stand in front, where you can really connect."

The mentoring team first helped Jeanine reimagine her brand identity, which featured dark and funereal images. "Not only was it in contrast to her message of hope," says Thomas, "but it was also in jarring contrast to Jeanine's personality, which is sunny and warm. We knew we needed to develop a whole new look." Thomas researched the psychology of colors and the team decided on



L-R: Jeanine Ferguson of Hope Greetings, Program Facilitator Amy Calfee, Pat Blanchard, Director, of the Jacksonville Women's Business Center, mentor Jamie Thomas

(photo credit: Carlee Calfee)



a vibrant green logo that combines the look of a blossom and sunshine.

Hope Greetings' online e-commerce site got a makeover with new colors and photos that balanced the sad images with images of hope and joy. Based on her mentors' advice, Jeanine is poised to expand her product line to include secular messaging on her products in addition to scriptures and market them for joyful occasions such as anniversaries and graduations.

Jeanine gained more than a marketing plan from the program; she and Jamie Thomas have become fast friends and plan to stay in touch. "We're both busy professionals trying to balance family and career, and that made Jamie the perfect mentor for me," Jeanine says. Hope Greetings is still a part-time business, since Jeanine has taken on a part-time marketing role in a medical practice, but Jeanine believes that she'll achieve her goal of \$70,000 in revenue by the end of the year. Thanks to Marketing Matters, she has a plan and the support to make it happen.