

Thea Jeffers, Success Story – March 29, 2019

By Lorrie DeFrank



Jazz club owner and interior decorator Thea Jeffers exudes success. While she takes credit for the vision and ambition, she readily admits that she acquired the knowledge and skills she needed to succeed from the Jacksonville Women’s Business Center and other agencies that support women business owners.

“It doesn’t matter where you come from or start. It’s possible to own a business or two,” said Jeffers, crediting JWBC with giving her confidence to overcome multiple obstacles and to persevere when the going got tough.

Though she had extensive experience working in human resources administration for corporations, she lacked communication and other skills necessary to follow her dream of being her own boss. Now the owner of T-works Interior Decorating and Breezy Jazz Club, where she has no qualms about taking the stage to make announcements, she is grateful to her many mentors who guided her step-by-step.

As a young girl growing up in Philadelphia, Jeffers sewed her own clothes, compulsively rearranged her mother’s home and became a jazz fan—all springboards to her future success. Soon after moving to California to study fashion design at Brooks College she met Jeff Jeffers, her husband of 35 years whose military career brought them to Jacksonville. Sidetracked by the corporate world, Jeffers did part-time alterations and decorating until those jobs became lucrative enough to give her the courage to start her own business, concentrating on interior decorating.

“I went to SCORE, because I didn’t know how to start a business,” she said, recalling how the professional volunteers helped her obtain licenses and provided other start-up advice. “From there I joined the Chamber, the gift that keeps on giving.”

Jeffers said JAX Chamber’s women’s business program offered the networking opportunities and classes that helped her attain goals. “Everything they offered, I took,” she said. “Being around business-minded women helped me stay focused.”

She cultivated her leadership style through JWBC’s Venture Leadership program and learned how to promote her products through its pilot Marketing Model class. “I didn’t know anything about marketing let alone have a budget for marketing,” Jeffers said. “I had to pull from that class whatever I could and use all the freebies that I learned about. They gave you tips on how to market on a low budget and when to market and how often, and also stressed how crucial it is to market. People have to know you are here.”

Although Jeffers had been a successful business owner for more than a decade with T-works she took Venture Leadership before launching Breezy to help her determine the culture of her new

business and anticipate the particular challenges it would bring, according to Ashlea Justice, JWBC program coordinator. “She wanted to be ahead of the game,” Justice said. Through JWBC networking, Jeffers landed contracts to work with major construction companies as the interior decorating partner on three Starbucks, three Arby’s and one FedEx location. “I painted that big red stripe outside of Arby’s,” she said.

Working from home as a decorator to save overhead costs, Jeffers struggled with coming up with operating capital and competing with larger decorators. “I found my niche was lower-income people who still wanted beautiful spaces,” she said. “I went small, gave it my very best and I grew.” Fourteen years later, her services range from decorating bathrooms to 5,000-square-foot mansions.

The financial success of T-works enabled Jeffers to open Breezy Jazz Club in downtown Jacksonville, fulfilling a promise she made to herself at age 30 when she and her husband were at a jazz club in London. That day she told him that when she is 50 she is going to open her own club. And she did.

Two years old, Breezy has earned a reputation as a popular jazz house in Jacksonville and beyond, offering professional entertainment, meals and a full bar. Famous jazz trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis performed there on New Year’s Eve. “There’s no better feeling than to sit at the front window and see all the seats full with happy guests,” Jeffers said. “That tells me I’m doing a great job.”

But the beginning wasn’t easy, with failing building inspections, hiring reliable staff and learning new industries, including food service. “I kept going because I had a desire to succeed. I connected with the right people, through research and networking,” she said. “Every time JWBC had an event, I would go.”

She listened to mentors and surrounded herself with experts. “I was like a sponge. I let them teach me,” she said. Giving back, Jeffers hosts networking events at Breezy to encourage other women to connect and succeed.

Jeffers advises aspiring women business owners to take advantage of JWBC’s programs. “You get your money back after your first class, in my opinion,” she said.

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