

Spend more than *Just a Moment* with the April Businesswoman of the Month

By Laura Freeman

Jackie Swanson, owner of Just a Moment Canvas Images in Mentor, is the Lake County Business Journal April Businesswoman of the Month. Swanson says she owes her success to fellow businesswomen, including Emily Koenig, who runs her own business, a Web and print design company, also in Mentor.

“I think Jackie is an amazing business person,” Koenig said. “She’s very passionate about her business and making sure her customers get the best possible product. And not everybody does that these days.”

Koenig met Swanson doing volunteer work. Besides hosting foreign exchange students and being past president of Rice Elementary, Shore Junior High and Lake County Council’s Parent Teacher Association, Swanson is involved in the Mentor Junior Women’s Club, the Mentor Chamber of Commerce and the women’s ministries group at Advent Church.

“I’ve always been amazed at Jackie’s level of energy and her passion for community service,” Koenig said. “She’s just one of those people who, if there’s something that needs to be done, Jackie raises her hand. That’s something else that doesn’t happen a lot these days.”

Koenig is also a customer. Swanson created a canvas image for Koenig of her dog which she describes as “gorgeous.”

“The canvas print adds a whole other dimension to the photograph,” Koenig said. “If you are looking for someone who cares about your precious pictures as much as you do, Jackie is that person. She’s amazing.”

Koenig says customer service like Swanson offers is the key to staying in business right now.

“I am really confident when I say that or I wouldn’t still be in business myself,” she said.

She mentioned a number of Web sites that claim to offer the same type of service Swanson offers.

“She is so cost-competitive and a real live breathing person who really cares about her clients – you can’t get that over the Internet,” she said.

Mentor resident Millie Waterman met Swanson 20 years ago, serving on the Lake County Council PTA together for many years.

“Jackie is a hard worker in anything she does. She is dedicated and just a very fine person,” Waterman said. “I have enjoyed her friendship. She’s a great leader. Any project that was necessary to do she was a part of.”

Swanson considers Waterman one of her mentors.

“If I’ve been a mentor to Jackie it’s because she’s easy to instruct and to lead and a delight to work with,” Waterman said. “I have been a part of the PTA movement for over 50 years and part of the national PTA so I have a lot of information I can give to PTA leaders and I’ve enjoyed doing that.”

Swanson, a stay-at-home mom turned business owner, says she learned organizational skills through that volunteer work, not realizing how it would eventually help her in business.

“I was fortunate to be able to stay home with the boys when they were young. I had a few part-time jobs over the years, trying to decide just what it was I wanted to be when I grew up,” she said. “When this company started, Gary (Swanson, her husband) called and asked if I wanted to do some framing.”

So she began making frames at what was then Grant Sterling, with never a thought that it would one day become her own company. Owned by an investment firm, the idea was to market the product and open stores in malls across the country.

The business model changed several times over the years, never quite finding the right market. Instead of closing the company, the investors asked Swanson if she wanted to take it over. So in December 2007, she bought the business, renamed it Just a Moment and moved it to Progress Parkway in Mentor.

With no business background, she says it has been quite an adventure.

“I’ve learned it’s probably not the smartest decision I’ve ever made taking over a small business,” she said. “I also learned you need to keep your eyes and ears open, attend a lot of meetings, talk to a lot of people, tweak what I see that works for other people and adapt it to my needs. Some ideas fit what I do, others don’t. It’s constant learning for me – I never had to use a computer, so in addition to running the business, I am faced with learning all the technical aspects of my work as well.”

Tom Szabo, owner of A Thomas Image, nominated Swanson for Businesswoman of the Month. Szabo says he is impressed with what she has accomplished since becoming the owner of her own business.

“When the owners of Grant Sterling decided to close the business, they asked Jackie Swanson if she was interested in a deal to take over ownership,” Szabo said. “Since taking the helm, the focus of the business has changed, opening opportunities that would previously have been passed up. Through our weekly Downsized Into Business Startup Network meetings, I’ve watched Jackie transform from a production manager to a business owner - a task not always possible.”

Laura Freeman is editor of the Lake County Business Journal.