

LEADING LADIES

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Colorado where she was active with an area humane society wanting to add retail business to help fund the shelter. Jaeger began investigating pet stores in the Denver area to see what they carried, and then the couple moved to Nantucket. When they arrived, with pets in tow, Jaeger realized that she had no outlets for the types of foods or supplies she was used to buying for her pets and began thinking about opening her own business.

Within six months, Jaeger found an available location in the basement of the Sanford Boat Building and lined up distributors. She launched Geronimo's, named after her beloved late Chesapeake Bay retriever, and stayed in that location seven years, expanding the space and inventory and introducing grooming services. In 1997 she moved into her current Pleasant Street location, which she had built on the land.

"I thought it made sense to be my own landlord. It's a great location and we're able to have more space as a result," she said.

Her client base increased through word-of-mouth, particularly as she understood that not only did Nantucket pet owners have dogs and cats, they had other small animals, birds and some turtles and she started including supplies for those species as well. Staff grew with the inventory and Jaeger stays cur-

rent with trade shows and customer information passed to her that keeps her abreast of trends and new products. She believes Nantucket offers a special environment for anyone — particularly women — to try their hand at business.

"I didn't know a thing about retail. Nantucket is such a forgiving place to have a business. I could never have done this in Weymouth or some other place. Nantucket is such an inviting climate for a small business," said Jaeger, who in 1995 started the Mid-Island Partnership with Theresa Davis to promote business in the area. They stepped down last year because of personal and business time constraints after gathering more than 100 businesses into the organization.

"We are kind of separate from the rest of the world and it encourages a sense of independence," Jaeger added. "From my own standpoint, my husband, a silent partner who has no connection with the business, has been very supportive of me. I've likened this to being more compelling than having a child where the two of you are involved. When [a business] is all yours it's your own baby."

MARY BETH SPLAINE

As the grande dame of the island's gallery world, Mary Beth Splaine has held court representing local artists for 29 years since she opened South Wharf Gallery on Old South Wharf in 1978. Splaine started

coming here at the end of the 1950s when she was in college and had a friend with family on Nantucket. Splaine's cousin, Judith Powers, also living on the island, once ran the Granary Gallery on Old South Wharf and closed it at about the same time Splaine began her business.

She was fortunate to inherit some of Powers' artists, but Splaine did very well very quickly, to expand on her artist representations, seeking 'edgy, unique art,' and increased her reputation. She also increased her gallery space to an adjacent building on Old South Wharf in 1999 so she could host a group show at the same time she held a one person show. Last year, Splaine opened a gallery at 3 India St. At that time she retained the Old South Wharf location, but this year decided to limit her business to India Street as well as showing works in a home studio environment.

"I think what draws us all to Nantucket besides the beauty is the sense that individuality is cherished here," she said. "I remember when I went to a Rotary Club meeting as a speaker but there were no women members. Women from my generation had some struggles for positions of influence, and today's young women, thankfully, take it all for granted. They are treated as individuals. I don't think it's as true elsewhere as it is here. We cherish individuals. I think Nantucket, on the whole, is very accepting of people's individuality and it's a wonderful place to grow your individuality."

THERESA DAVIS

Theresa Davis is about a lot more than creating pretty hair styles. She is a keen businesswoman who started as someone's employee, watched the industry's trends, knew where she wanted to go and made it happen.

When Davis came here from Florida in 1972 she was an attendant at the Airport Beauty Salon. She later opened Davis Hair Designers in part of the Marine Home Center complex and in the early 1980s determined that her best move would be to start her own salon on her own property. She purchased her present location on Pleasant Street before Glidden's Seafoods, Geronimo's, The SeaGrille or the Nantucket Commons existed and obtained her mortgage from "Hank the Bank" Henry Kehlenbach at Pacific Bank.

"He looked over my application and plans and slammed his hand on the desk and said, 'You know, I like a girl with balls.'"

Davis's salon opened in 1983, but she sold the business to spend a year in Florida. When she returned to Nantucket, Davis worked part-time at R.J. Miller's, but when she learned the person she had sold her business to had moved to another property, since she still owned the original property, she returned to her business.

"What I decided then, when hair salons were mostly just hair, was to do something different from the relaxation point of view," Davis explained. "I researched the most comfortable cutting chairs, the best music to play and put all the emphasis on client comfort."

At that point, Davis had just one facial room, one manicure table and four hairdressing chairs. By 1994, she had added a spa with a hydro-tub, a steam room, three massage and body treatment rooms, showers and a locker room. She began running out of space again and took over an adjacent unit in her building to add three facial rooms, a make-up area, a tanning room and additional manicure and pedicure stations.

"That's it — no more," Davis said of her expansion, but added her insights on why the island seems to embrace women in business. "I think it does come from the history of Nantucket. Those women paved the way for us today, and each generation is building on that. On Nantucket, women have always been strong community leaders and business people, and women have the capacity to do a lot of things at one time. It's just our gender that we're capable of doing that."

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