

# Wellesley Weston

M A G A Z I N E



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# Women In Charge

## Wellesley and Weston Business Owners

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Four women in charge. clockwise from upper left: Mollie Johnson, Zoe Lasden-Lyman, Suzanne Bates, and Jennifer Casner.

### you could say

we've come a long way, baby.

Despite its cliché sound, it's true. According to the Center for Women's Business Research, one in eleven of today's adult women is an entrepreneur. One in seven employees works for a women-owned business. Both in Massachusetts and nationally, the numbers are continually growing.

Owning a business may sound like a great idea. Pick a hobby of your choice, secure financing, order a phone line and that's it, right? Independence, here you come. Although necessary to some degree, these simple steps will only get

you so far. It's a venture that's far from easy, regardless of your industry.

Patricia G. Greene, Ph.D., the Dean of the Undergraduate School of Babson College in Wellesley and President's Endowed Chair in Entrepreneurship, has a good rule of thumb when figuring out if you can fit a new business into your life. Take a guess about how much time and money you think it's going to cost you. Now double it.

"[You] have to realize and understand that it's going to take twice as much time and money as expected," she warns. "Our culture these days now understands that it's difficult to start your own business, but time is still usually underestimated." But once you can get past the hurdles of spent time, energy and money, she believes it's all worth it.

"Success from an entrepreneurial endeavor can be measured in all types of ways and all types of rewards may flow back," says Greene, also the co-author of *Clearing the Hurdles: Women Building High-Growth Businesses*.

"It's not necessarily about financial success," she admits. "It's about freedom to do things your way, to create jobs for people you care about, to come up with a new service, to be able to contribute resources to the community. When they do surveys of entrepreneurs, making money usually isn't the top motivation. Usually independence is Number One."

commerce  
retailing  
entrepreneurship  
keeping track

business

startups  
investments  
capital

business "the hardest employee to hire is the first one"

Speaking of money, financing is probably one of the largest (and most dangerous) steppingstones when it comes to beginning a business. Be wary of how you choose to finance your endeavor.

"Not all money is good money," warns Greene. She touts the necessity of "matching sources of money to the opportunity being pursued. There's the 'right' money for different stages of a business."

"Do your research," she continues. "There are so many programs out there that you can learn about financing a business. They are available at schools, from the government. There are even networks of women entrepreneurs. Talk to lots of women entrepreneurs and see what lessons they have learned."

When it comes to planning out your financial investment in your new company, Greene also suggests this as a good time to ask yourself what you want your business to be.

"Think about what you really want this business to be short-term and longer-term," she suggests. "Also think about what role you want to fill. Will you be hands-on and produce the service or will you be working on building the business? It's not always harder to grow a larger business; it's just a different skill set. You also have to think about whether you want to be responsible for other people's employment. The hardest employee to hire is the first one."

FACT

The number of women-owned businesses in the U.S. increased at nearly twice the rate of all other firms (17% vs. 9%) from 1997 to 2004.

Source: Center for Women's Business Research and the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Finally, no matter how business savvy you consider yourself, Greene advises that you don't try to tackle this endeavor alone. "You can't possibly have all the answers to questions about starting and building the business," she says. "It's important to be open to asking for help."

Listed here are four women business owners that Wellesley and Weston residents should be proud to call neighbor. Although each woman's success story is worth volumes, this is a brief glimpse into their lives and the process they went through in thinking about—and carefully building—a business of their own.

### Home Sweet Home

A home begins with the foundation, but ends with the comforting touches of couches, pictures and drapes. Mollie Johnson is there every step of the way.

"What I do is soup to nuts," she says, her voice echoing over the phone in her newly expanded office space in Wellesley—a far cry from

Mollie Johnson  
Mollie Johnson Interiors



BRIAN SMITH

BRIAN SMITH

## business “there’s always a challenge”

her meager start 13 years ago, out of her home in Cambridge. Now a Wellesley resident with her husband and two teenagers, Johnson has created Mollie Johnson Interiors, a successful business that makes people’s dream homes realities.

“There is a difference between decorating and interior design. I work with architects during new home construction and large renovations,” she explains. “I come in very early and help select all of the plumbing, tiles, hard surfaces, and provide the specs for the architect. Then I get into the furniture and fabrics.”

Johnson herself has transformed, from a South Carolina native to a childhood in Europe, from an art history major in college to a brief, unhappy stint on Wall Street. “I had to get in touch with my creative side, so I went into decorating,” she says.

“I thought: I’m just going to do this myself. My first client was a friend. One thing led to another, and it all became referrals,” she says.

Now she and her four employees assist 20 clients, each project lasting typically fifteen to eighteen months. One of her vendors recently referred to Mollie Johnson Interiors among the top five Boston area designers they deal with volume-wise.

“I’m serious about what I do. I’m working hard to be one of the best. That’s my goal,” says Johnson.

Being serious is important, but having a sense of humor can get everyone through a stressful period of home renovation or construction. Johnson employs both emotions when working with clients.

“I like to put myself in their shoes,” she says. “You have to keep in mind the stress level and be empathetic. I try to have a sense of humor and make it an enjoyable process because it’s a long process. It’s almost like a marriage.”

As she works on building her own business, Johnson always finds a new test to pass.

### FACT

**As of 2004, 41.3% (233,139) of all privately held firms in Massachusetts are more than 50% owned by women.**

Source: Center for Women’s Business Research and the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

“There’s always a challenge in owning your own business, not just because of the responsibility, but because you’re on your own,” she says. But that doesn’t sway Johnson. “It’s the greatest thing besides my family,” she admits. “It’s the most gratifying experience any woman or man could ever have.”

### One Woman’s Treasure Trove

“One of the major reasons I created and funded my own business was so I could be in control,” says Dale Lasden, proprietor of Trove Fine Home Furnishings & Gifts in Weston. “I had no patience with preconceived notions of what a woman in her 50’s could or should do,” she said.



Zoe Lasden-Lyman  
Trove Fine Home Furnishings & Gifts

BRIAN SMITH