

NEW VENTURES



PHOTO/BRANDON MCKENNEY

Nancy Sherin

Renewal clause

A conversation with Nancy Sherin, owner, **Brunswick Reupholstering Co.** in Brunswick

Founded: July 2009 (originally founded by her father in 1959, newly restarted and incorporated)

Employees: 0

Startup costs: \$15,000

Projected revenue, year one: \$42,000

Projected revenue, year two: \$100,000

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1157 Mere Point Road, Brunswick
www.brunswickreupholstering.com

Why did you decide to launch this business?

I worked at L.L.Bean for 24 years, the last 12 of which I was responsible for the sourcing and quality of their entire indoor and outdoor furniture line. After I and some of my coworkers were let go as a consequence of corporate downsizing, I took some time to think about what I wanted to do and decided I would resurrect the family business. My father, James Connolly, was the founder and he did the best upholstery of furniture around; he did furniture for governors and ex-governors, in fact I think some of his furniture is still in Augusta. We reupholster all types of furniture, both residential and commercial, and we work with

eight different fabric suppliers. Especially nowadays with people starting to think more about the environment, Brunswick Reupholstering fits right in. On the back of our card is our motto, "Reuse, repurpose, reupholster."

How do you market your business?

We hired someone to put up a website for us and it's been wonderful, it's drawn a lot of business in. People will call or e-mail through the website, so that's paid for itself already. We also have company signs on our vehicles and we advertise in a local newspaper in the Harpswell area. I also make sales calls; I called a hospital because I noticed their furniture looked worn and I went over there and they asked me to send them a proposal. I'm not afraid to go out there and look for jobs.

I'd say 33% of my customers are coming from my website, another 40% are people that I knew and the rest found me online or in the phone book or I go out and find them.

How has the economy affected your business?

I don't think the economy has really affected the people who have their furniture upholstered because they generally aren't living paycheck to paycheck and they have

a little bit more money. My average customer is 50-60 years old, either a professional or retired, they may have grandchildren and like to entertain or want people to see nice things in their home. I've got jobs lined up for the next couple of months.

How did you finance this business?

I was very fortunate. When L.L.Bean asked me to leave, they gave me a severance package so it's all been my own money.

What's been the biggest challenge running this business and how have you overcome that challenge?

I would say the biggest challenge is letting the customer know about the cost. Reupholstering is not a cheap thing to do. Another challenge is time, making sure I'm out here every day putting in the time I need at the shop. But I think I've mastered that challenge. It's just me, but my husband has been very supportive and he helps with pickups and deliveries. I strip the furniture and reupholster it and when it gets delivered I'm there. For me, it was a family business, so I learned it from the bottom up and started by sweeping floors. We all had to do our time in the shop and then I moved up to making buttons and then blind-sewing and other aspects of the business. Many upholsters I know either hire subcontractors or work with subcontractors, but my father did it all and I do it all.

What are your goals for the future of your business?

I think my chief goal is to have the same reputation that the business had under my father and for people to know that Brunswick Reupholstering provides the best customer service. In the next five years I also want to triple the floor space of the shop and purchase a van for delivery. I also have two daughters and would love it if one of them picked up the reins and took it over so I could retire! I never expected to be doing what I'm doing, I expected to be at L.L.Bean until I retired, but it created an opportunity and enabled me to fulfill a dream I didn't even know I had.

Interview by Mercedes Grandin

New Ventures profiles young businesses, 6-18 months old. Send your suggestions and contact information to editorial@mainebiz.biz.

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