

Orlando Business Journal - May 18, 2009
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ORLANDO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, May 15, 2009

OBJ's 2009 Women Who Mean Business winners and finalists

Orlando Business Journal - by [Kelsey Hinton](#)

In this issue, **Orlando Business Journal** recognizes Central Florida businesswomen whose hard work, commitment and innovation have helped shape their companies and our community.

This year, 15 women are finalists in three categories: Business Owner of the Year, Business Executive of the Year and Up-and-Comer of the Year.

BUSINESS OWNER OF THE YEAR

Winner: Jill Schwartz

Title: Managing partner, Law Offices of Jill S. Schwartz & Associates PA.

First job: Snow cone server for \$1.14 an hour plus tips.

Favorite reward: Watching a movie with my husband and my four dogs.

Favorite eatery: Café 118°.

Who helped me succeed: My husband, Marc, and my mother.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The sunshine.

Little-known fact: I practice transcendental meditation daily for relaxation.

Motto: Every obstacle is an opportunity.

I've always wanted to learn to: Achieve fluency in sign language.

Favorite vacation spot: Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Ariz.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Participating in the opening of Hospice of the Comforter's Hospice House.

Important business lesson learned: Great change is made in small steps.

Finalist: Helene Abrams

Title: Founder and CEO, eprentise LLC.

First job: Babysitting for 50 cents an hour.

Favorite reward: Sitting on a raft in the pool with a good book.

Favorite eatery: Maggiano's Little Italy.

Who helped me succeed: My husband.

Favorite thing about Orlando: You can be on vacation for even a few hours by going to the theme parks or sitting by your own pool.

Little-known fact: I've been in technology for 30 years and have never had a computer course. My undergraduate degree was in pharmacy.

Motto: Do everything with integrity and a good attitude.

I've always wanted to learn to: Make croissants and pastries.

Favorite vacation spot: Southeast Asia.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Helping others with their businesses, helping my customers succeed, helping people in transition and helping people develop new skills. I am proud of their successes.

Important business lesson learned: Surround myself with great people, help them succeed, and then I will succeed.

Finalist: Jennifer Quigley

Title: Principal, **WBQ Design & Engineering Inc.**

First job: Lifeguard for \$2 an hour.

Favorite reward: A day at the beach.

Favorite eatery: Little Saigon.

Who helped me succeed: Business partner, Derek Burke.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The spirit of the people who believe in downtown and the great arts movement.

Little-known fact: Two wonderful kids, Cori and Greg.

Motto: Some is better than none.

I've always wanted to learn to: Snowboard.

Favorite vacation spot: Any warm, sunny beach.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Helping ensure the three venues vote passed.

Important business lesson learned: Never burn a bridge, and the most important asset in any business is the people who work there.

Finalist: Sandra Saft

Title: Founder and president, Window Interiors.

First job: Advertising coordinator for Albee Homes in Ohio for \$100 per week.

Favorite reward: Travel, usually near or on the water.

Favorite eatery: Seasons 52.

Who helped me succeed: Clients who served as mentors, and my husband.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The people and the fact that we still enjoy a small-city feeling with big-city vision.

Little-known fact: I used to be shy, and math was not my best subject, so I would rather deal with people than numbers.

Motto: Keep an open mind, positive attitude and share it forward.

I've always wanted to learn to: Play the piano.

Favorite vacation spot: Hawaii or on a cruise ship.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Completion of our largest and most complex project at the beautiful new Ginsburg Tower at **Florida Hospital**.

Important business lesson learned: Listen to it all, but go with my gut.

Finalist: Annetta Wilson

Title: President, Annetta Wilson Media Training & Success Coaching.

First job: Reporter at WMBB-TV in Panama City for about \$200 a week.

Favorite reward: Massages and pedicures.

Favorite eatery: Amura.

Who helped me succeed: My parents.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The people and opportunities to connect .

Little-known fact: My oil paintings won awards when I was a teenager.

Motto: With God, all things are possible.

I've always wanted to learn to: Speak French fluently.

Favorite vacation spot: Anywhere with my husband, but I loved Paris.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Being one of nine coaches featured in the book Coaching For Success .

Important business lesson learned: Correct your course as you go, but get started.

BUSINESS EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

Winner: Meg Crofton

Title: President, Walt Disney World Resort.

First job: Winn-Dixie cashier for \$1.45 an hour.

Favorite reward: A weekend at the beach with my husband.

Favorite eatery: I love to discover "best-kept secrets" near where I live, like the breakfast vegetable frittata at Brandywine's Deli.

Who helped me succeed: My parents.

Favorite thing about Orlando: There is a strong sense of community here. Central Florida is visionary and has dreams.

Little-known fact: "Meg" is an acronym. My given name was Mary Elizabeth Gilbert, but my parents started calling me Meg the day I was born.

Motto: Do your best and then forgive yourself.

I've always wanted to learn to: Speak several languages fluently.

Favorite vacation spot: Walt Disney World, of course.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: I reflect on every year, and I am pleased if I have grown as a person and a leader, and if I've truly given back to my family, my company and my community.

Important business lesson learned: The leader is the person who has the vision, who can motivate and shape minds and hearts, and has the confidence to trust the details to a talented team.

Finalist: Danielle Courtenay

Title: Chief marketing officer, Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau Inc.

First job: Working in a candy store in Carmel, Ind.

Favorite reward: A massage.

Favorite eatery: It depends on my mood and who I am with.

Who helped me succeed: My father.

Favorite thing about Orlando: How it is constantly evolving. It is a world-class city and getting better.

Little-known fact: I was a diver for Auburn University.

Motto: Make the best of every day.

I've always wanted to learn to: Drive a racecar.

Favorite vacation spot: The beach or anywhere I have not been.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Being named the chief marketing officer for the world's greatest travel destination.

Important business lesson learned: Always take the high road and put yourself in your audience's shoes before making decisions.

Finalist: Karen Diebel

Title: Executive director, Verizon Business.

First job: Nordstrom, \$5 per hour.

Favorite reward: Sleep and golf.

Favorite eatery: Ruth's Chris Steakhouse.

Who helped me succeed: My parents mortgaged their house to send me to the University of Notre Dame. When I was accepted, my father said "we'll find a way."

Favorite thing about Orlando: Most certainly the weather.

Little-known fact: I enjoy attending church. Having an opportunity to reflect in a quiet place and listen to the wisdom of others is energizing and centering.

Motto: Give back.

I've always wanted to learn to: Snowboard.

Favorite vacation spot: Aspen, Colo.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: I completed my second year leading the Verizon global outsourcing and integration practice. My greatest achievement was building the talent that has successfully worked together on our Fortune 100 clients and their most complex issues.

Important business lesson learned: With whom you work is more important than the work you do.

Finalist: Linda Landman Gonzalez

Title: Vice president of community relations and government affairs, **Orlando Magic**.

First job: Desk clerk at a Plaid Stamps Redemption Store for \$45 a week.

Favorite reward: Travel.

Favorite eatery: Gargis on a Saturday afternoon.

Who helped me succeed: My husband and children.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The diversity of the people.

Little-known fact: I love to sing.

Motto: "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality." — Martin Luther King Jr.

I've always wanted to learn to: Dance.

Favorite vacation spot: Mexico.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Creating a multicultural initiative incorporated into all business units of the Orlando Magic organization.

Important business lesson learned: Listen.

Finalist: Linda Watson

Title: Chief executive officer, Lynx.

First job: Clerk typist for about \$350 per month.

Favorite reward: Travel to some place I've never been before.

Favorite eatery: Harmoni.

Who helped me succeed: My parents who gave me the values that are key to success.

Favorite thing about Orlando: All the great women.

Little-known fact: I used to dive off cliffs.

Motto: Just do it.

I've always wanted to learn to: Paint.

Favorite vacation spot: Paris and the beach.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: By restructuring the entire system to improve overall efficiency and reduce costs, we were able to avoid massive reductions that seemed imminent last summer when Lynx was faced with a significant funding decrease.

Important business lesson learned: Start with the end goal in mind and work backward.

UP-AND-COMER OF THE YEAR

Winner: Kimberly Lawton Koon

Title: President and CEO, Lawton Printers.

First job: Collating in the bindery at Lawton Printers when I was 8 years old earning 50 cents an hour.

Favorite reward: Traveling.

Favorite eatery: Ravenous Pig.

Who helped me succeed: My parents.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The sense of community and exciting growth of downtown.

Little-known fact: As a hobbying artist, one of my first paintings done in the seventh grade was selected to hang in the Florida Capitol Building.

Motto: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

I've always wanted to learn to: Fly a plane.

Favorite vacation spot: Cinque Terre, Italy.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Honored by OBJ as a Top 40 Under 40 and continuing to grow our business in spite of the current economic conditions.

Important business lesson learned: Treat your employees as family and only worry about the things you can change.

Finalist: Renee McCalla-Watson

Title: CEO, Therapy Dynamics.

First job: Customer associate at Eckerd Drugs for \$6 per hour.

Favorite reward: Shopping and getting massages.

Favorite eatery: **Cheesecake Factory**.

Who helped me succeed: God, Roy Assad and other mentors.

Favorite thing about Orlando: Restaurants and the beautiful weather.

Little-known fact: I am Jamaican.

Motto: Make decisions based on where you're going, not where you've been.

I've always wanted to learn: Ballroom dancing.

Favorite vacation spot: Puerto Rico.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: 200 percent increase in revenue of business from the previous year.

Important business lesson learned: Make a decision after gathering all the facts, and stick by that decision.

Finalist: Gaby Ortigoni

Title: Director of marketing and sales, **Hispanic Chamber of Commerce**.

First job: Department store clerk for \$50 a week.

Favorite reward: Traveling.

Favorite eatery: Eggplant parmesan from Macaroni Grill.

Who helped me succeed: My mom, my husband, my previous boss, Luis Pastrana, and my current boss, Ramón Ojeda.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The exciting opportunity to be part of its growth.

Little-known fact: I play the guitar, and I love Snoopy (from Peanuts).

Motto: To live my life with gratitude and passion.

Favorite vacation spot: Any archaeological destination.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Organizing the business mission trip to Mexico City. This was the first time the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce organized a business mission trip to another country.

Important business lesson learned: Business success is the result of self-determination, discipline, work ethics and passion.

Finalist: Angel Shawver

Job Title: Vice president of business development, **Florida Business Interiors**.

First job: Sales clerk at **The Body Shop**.

Favorite reward: Shoes.

Favorite eatery: Hue.

Who helped me succeed: Denny Bowman, owner of Florida Business Interiors.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The weather and proximity to the beaches and attractions.

Little-known fact: I worked at Walt Disney World as a chipmunk (i.e., Chip 'n Dale) while I was in college. During summer break, I cruised back and forth to the Bahamas performing as Chip on the Big Red Boat.

Motto: Think positive. If you believe it can happen, it will.

I've always wanted to learn to: Kayak in white water.

Favorite vacation spot: Hope Town, Bahamas.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: I have made it a priority to become significantly involved in many professional organizations in Central Florida. The ability to make a difference in the community and the close professional relationships I have formed as a result are some of my greatest achievements this year.

Important business lesson learned: It's better to give, and it eventually comes back around.

Finalist: Karolyn Stewart

Title: Marketing team manager, **MSCW Inc.**

First job: Buser/server/hostess at the Lighthouse Café in Sanibel Island for \$5 an hour plus great food.

Favorite reward: A trip to the spa.

Favorite eateries: Kata Thai Sushi and Pom Pom's.

Who helped me succeed: My parents, family, friends, mentors and husband.

Favorite thing about Orlando: The many distinct neighborhoods.

Little-known fact: I love to cook.

Motto: Find your happiness.

I've always wanted to learn to: Sign.

Favorite vacation spot: Nevis, West Indies.

Greatest professional achievement in 2008: Completing my MBA at the **University of Florida** while working full time.

Important business lesson learned: Take time to develop your brand identity, both professionally and personally.

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