



Photo by Steven Wall

Janine Alea, owner and operator of Cloud Nine Futons, says her business is a learning experience.

Futon maker sewing her way to success

By Marianne Chin
Of the Emerald

When University senior Janine Alea was asked what it's like to go to school while running her own business, she reached up to pull her long hair at the roots.

Though the commitments on her time are great, Alea, sole owner and operator of Cloud Nine Futons, says the experience she is gaining from being her own boss is worth the sacrifices she has made to get her business going.

"I'm learning so much about things that maybe I could learn in the business school," says Alea, a math and computer science major. "But there's nothing like experience outside the classroom. I'm astounded at the quantity there still is to learn."

Alea had owned a futon, a traditional Japanese bed, for six years before her neighbor approached her last spring and asked if she knew of anyone interested in buying her futon-making business.

"It just fell into my lap," she says. "It seemed too good an opportunity to pass up. It was an opportunity to learn a lot about interacting with people on a business level."

Alea paid \$720 to take over the business last July and estimates she has paid \$2,000 of

her own money to acquire her stock of materials and to cover other costs.

"My initial energy was in advertising," she says. Fliers promoting her hand-crafted, all-natural product are posted on bulletin boards around campus and around town.

Alea says she puts from six to seven hours into each bed she

and propped against walls to form chairs or sofas.

One of the advantages of a futon is it is more relaxing to sleep on than conventional beds, Alea says. She adds that futons are easy to move, and, therefore, are popular among students. Also, she says because futons have no springs, they last longer and don't get

about owning her own business and has learned from the ground up how to run it. She set up and manages her own accounting books, makes up and distributes her own advertisements, and commutes to Portland to purchase her supplies. Her previous work experiences include math tutoring and math-related lab work, and teaching at a middle school and a community college. In addition, Alea says she has sewn for years.

Alea "is the whole business," she says, but customers have helped, by trading their services or goods for one of her beds. She has received bookkeeping help, car rental and advice on efficiency through this barter system, and she says she always welcomes trades.

One of the difficulties Alea encounters in her busy schedule is choosing between her commitments to her classes and herself, and commitments to her customers, many of whom are students.

"I'm not going to get a 4.0 this term," she says.

But regardless of the demands her growing business puts on her time, Alea says the satisfaction of making a high quality product is gratifying. Seeing her customers go out the door with smiles on their faces is satisfaction enough, she says.

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— Janine Alea

makes, which includes time allotted for advertising, discussing specifications with the customer and driving to Portland to pick up supplies.

Construction of a futon begins with sewing a cotton "envelope" for the layers of four-inch-thick cotton batting. Then Alea fits the layers into the casing, working it with her hands to get the right firmness and smoothness. Tufts sewn through the futon hold the batting in place, and handles make it easy to transport the foldable bed. Futons can be placed directly on the floor or on frames. They can also be folded

lumpy, and since they are made of natural materials, they "can go to the compost pile" when they are disposed of.

Alea says a full-size futon weighs about 40 pounds and costs \$80. A regular full-size mattress can cost more than \$200.

In addition to spending about 12 hours a week studying and about 35 hours a week working with futons, Alea manages the Warehouse Artists Studios, downtown, which are rented out to artists and small craft-related businesses, including her own.

Alea says she never thought



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