

VENDOR OF THE YEAR SMALL BUSINESS ASSOCIATION WINNERS

Georgia O'Mary and Janie Millican had a vision of owning a company built on the premise of delivering the highest level of service to each and every client. Their vision came true when they pooled their talents in the contract furniture industry and founded GEO & JEM, Inc. in 1994.

They started their company in the basement of Georgia O'Mary's house with three employees. In the five years they have been in business, they have grown to a company that consists of 11 full time and two part time employees. From modest beginnings to a 4.5 million-dollar business, Georgia and Janie aimed to please clients.

They listened to their customers and anticipated what they wanted. They also knew that no one succeeds in business completely alone. Consequently, they developed a team of specialists with expertise in space planning, interior design and project management.

Their team service has made their business highly successful. As a result, they have developed a loyal client following because they are able to adapt their vision to their customers' tastes. Although building their business was difficult, Georgia and Janie persevered, sacrificed and dedicated themselves to achieve success. As a result, they have found



fulfillment.

A GOOD FOLLOWING

"We had a large open house in May. The remarks we got were, 'I can't believe how much your company has grown!' Our open house was the height of our five years of doing business.

We had worked together in another office furniture dealership. After many years, we had decided to go out on our own together. We left our customers from that store and 80% managed to find us and want our ser-

vice again."

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

"If there's a problem, we can take care of it. A lot of the dealers will charge the end-user for doing that. We do not support it.

A lot of customers are our friends. These friendships had developed over the last twenty years. We treat the customers as we would a friend. You want to do that if you can."

MAKING IT HAPPEN

"The first year, we had one employee. Our first year we were at \$80,000 in sales. We started in May five years ago and the first order that we had was in August for one file cabinet. Then, from August to December, we sold \$800,000 in furniture. The following year, we hired two more support staff and we raised our sales to \$1.5 million. It's been steady growth. Now we have two more sales people that help us. Altogether, there's four of us out in the field and five project managers who also work with the customers."

BACK ON TRACK

"We have a website. We really have not done too much with it. This year has been a year of growth for us. We have really concentrated on our showroom space.

We have changed softwares within the last year which has made a big difference to us. And so, last year, we did take out a website. It was probably a little bit premature and we have not paid the attention we should have to it. That is one of the areas we are targeting.

Ideally, we need to be able to get in there for our customers to order right out of our website. We don't have that technology. We're going to have to hire that in so that customers can order their file cabinets, chairs and other things.

We know of dealers who service customers through their website and the advantage is that they're getting orders nationwide. It's going to be a very big deal for the new millennium because that's how people are going to be ordering furniture.

I think you need to have products on the Web to order but you also need to still be old-fashioned and go out and call in the customers. I hope that never goes away."

BUSINESS SUPPORT GROUP

"The Oregon Native

American Chamber of Commerce has brought in so many good people. All of us are very close-knit and we try to help each other. When our members are in trouble, we rally. One of the member's daughter fell off her horse and left in critical condition. He's financially hurting so we all chipped in to help him out. The Chamber is going to donate money too. The Chamber is for Native Americans as a whole, it's not just for us."

GETTING REAL

"Expect to put in long hours, expect to make family sacrifices. Having an understanding family is #1 because you're never home. Keep on your toes. When you're having a great month, it never fails that something comes up to eat that profit.

If Georgia and I had known about all the organizations before who could have helped us, we would have had a much better start. We didn't have an idea that there was an OAME (Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs) or ONABEN for Native American Businesses.

We now have all these companies we can call on if we have a problem. That's important to have. Even though we're all competitors, we still call on each other. You don't want other people to trip and fall. You need each other."

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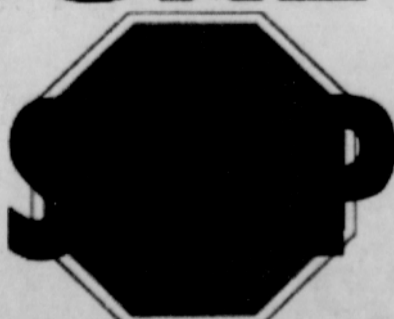
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