

ENTREPRENEURfrompage1A

Ruben said, “One of Marianne’s life lessons is that it takes guts. When I met her, I thought, ‘Wow, this woman has guts and she has spirit’ ... We’re really fortunate to have an incredible entrepreneur in town who has had well over five businesses here who will tell us her story.”

After meeting Brisbane earlier this year, Ruben invited her to talk about entrepreneurship in Florence and give her top three tips for running a successful business.

“I will tell you how I arrived at the place that I am today. ... It’s a long story, everyone, but from one thing came another,” Brisbane noted as she began first of telling of her childhood overseas and her process of moving to San Francisco with her family when she turned 16.

She lived in San Francisco for 35 years, marrying young and raising children before she decided to get a job at Wells Fargo Bank. Since she was a numbers person, she began working in loans and eventually as a real estate officer.

“That position really opened my eyes to another world, and I believe that’s where my entrepreneurship got started,” Brisbane said after she made the switch to selling real estate. “That’s where my career started, as far as doing different things, really getting out there and looking at different ways of how to make a living — and make a little bit more money.”

Eventually she met and later married a man named Martin, whom she called “a salesman par extraordinaire,” who had owned several fish and chips restaurants in London. He also bought antiques from the British countryside and brought them to the U.S. for sale. Together, they decided to open an antiques store and paired it with a tearoom — “Lovejoy’s Tea Room,” referencing the BBC’s “Lovejoy” TV series based on books by Jonathan Gash.

“People had never seen a tearoom like that. So we decided that every cup and saucer, every piece of furniture, you were able to buy. We had young couples come in on their first date buying their cups,” Brisbane said. “We had a whole thing going on there.”

In time, Brisbane’s father began looking at moving to Newport, Ore., and Brisbane and Martin decided to relocate to Florence. They put Lovejoy’s in its current spot on Nopal and First streets in Historic Old Town Florence. After a year, they opened Lovejoy’s as a restaurant across the Siuslaw River at Pierpoint Inn, which operated there for eight years.

“We had a huge British pub there in the beginning. It was wonderful,” Brisbane said.

They sold the business, and ultimately parted ways. Brisbane said she sat for a year, enjoying The Grape Leaf, when she noticed that a kite shop across the street was vacating its building.

“Whatever you do, you have to have a vision,” Brisbane said, who visualized a nice seafood restaurant in the space. While she was limited on funds after selling her house and the divorce, she was able to come up with a business plan.

She was 60 years old when she started Waterfront Depot on Bay Street.

“The idea was to bring something new to Florence, and something different,” Brisbane said. “After having lived in San Francisco for all those years, and having been around all those different styles of food, I felt like I should be doing something different than the normal coastal food of fish and

chips and all that deep-fried food.”

She built the restaurant from the ground up, utilizing the historic building, riverfront setting and restaurant furniture she already had to make something unique. She even cooked on the line for the first two years as she and her staff created a menu.

“My employees and I always call ‘we,’” Brisbane noted. “I had several employees that were almost like friends, and that really helped me start the business.”

In the meantime, the closure of Lovejoy’s at Pierpoint Inn had left her with enough furniture in storage for two restaurants.

“I realized there was enough tearoom furniture and stuff, and regular furniture and stuff, so that same day I drove around, and lo and behold, the space where I had first opened Lovejoy’s was for rent.”

Again she built the space from the ground up, refinishing, recarpeting and redoing the kitchen — “and what you see today is what Lovejoy’s is.”

In the time since, she sold Lovejoy’s and traced ownership to the current owners, who recently expanded the space and operational hours.

“The people who are running it now are doing a fantastic job on it,” Brisbane said.

Back at the Waterfront, there was an overflow of business.

“We had more people that we couldn’t seat than we could seat,” she said. Rather than thinking of that as a problem, “it was a door to go through,” she added.

Across the street, another business was in the process of moving out. It had a nice pizza oven and a nice space, but needed some improvements. She worked out a deal and opened 1285 Restobar, which she sold after eight years.

“I had to work on how to get the people from Waterfront into a pizza place. ... They’re not going to be happy if they have to eat Italian food when they came for seafood,” she said. “So I built the business based on the fact that I could give them similar seafood, but wrapped in an Italian-American package.”

Some of the signature seafood dishes got transformed — crab-encrusted halibut became parmesan-encrusted halibut — but some dishes remained similar.

“I had to think this out, since I really wanted people to be happy,” she said.

Brisbane also spent five days in Naples, Italy, where she went to every pizza restaurant and took advice on the best kind of tomatoes to use.

After selling Restobar, she and a friend opened a wine shop in the location of the Grape Leaf. After ending partnerships and ultimately buying the business back, “I wanted to go back to my roots from Indonesia,” Brisbane said, and opened Spice Restaurant.

She had a variety of chefs in the three to four years she operated it, but eventually sold. A few more years passed, and the restaurant there is now called Nosh.

In the meantime at the Waterfront, the person making desserts eventually left Florence, which led to Brisbane opening the Waterfront Bake Shop to make cakes and preordered desserts, as well as provide a catering service. In time, the baker bought the business, eventually renaming it Magnolia Bakery and also moving to Old Town Florence.

“And she’s doing quite well, baking her heart away,” Brisbane said.

To take over the catering portion, Brisbane opened Le Bouchon to do catering and operate a wine shop, which she eventually moved out of there to Bay and Laurel



CHANTELLE MEYER/SIUSLAW NEWS
Ariel Ruben and Marianne Brisbane share a laugh while talking about Florence’s entrepreneurial ecosystem and thriving Old Town.

streets, the Waterfront Wine Store & Provisions.

“So how did I get here?” Brisbane asked. “In December, I decided to pare down.”

She sold Le Bouchon, which is now Mari’s Kitchen, and closed the wine store, which is now Found and Milk & Cookies.

After 16 years, she also decided it was time to sell the Waterfront Depot and came to an agreement with Jordan and Elizabeth Stone.

The sale simplified her life a little bit, she said, but soon she was looking at ventures again. She bought a property on Eighth street to create the Florence 101 Hostel, which opened July 15. Then she saw an empty building on Laurel Street.

“I want something I can be in. I looked around and this space just looked different, so open,” Brisbane said. She emptied her last storage unit of furniture and fixtures and opened The Bodega Wine Store.

“It’s a place to just be in and feel good in. I don’t know about how you feel about it, but I think it’s a nice little spot here,” Brisbane said. “At this point in my life, I’m not looking for big bucks, I’m looking for being able to pay for it as I go and having a few good friends helping me in the business.”

At the end of the night, Brisbane shared some additional lessons she learned in her life.

“Everything starts with an idea,” she said. “That’s how I operated. If I had an idea or thought, I went through if it would work, how it would operate, how I would do it. ... My real estate experience and being able to put deals together has really helped me to purchase these places and think of the bigger picture. Instead of saying, ‘Oh I don’t know how’ — yes you can. There’s always a way to do it, and there are always people to help.”

She also recommended considering an audience or clientele when starting a business.

“You have to study your garden to see what you’re going to plant. You can’t just plant anything that you like,” she advised.

However, she also encouraged taking advantage of opportunities when they come by. She added that times will change, trends will come and go, and enterprises will not look the same in a decade as they do now.

“You cannot be afraid to start something new. If you want to be an entrepreneur, just go for it,” Brisbane said. “Don’t be afraid to lose, because you will lose at times. ... There’s no set formula for entrepreneurs.”

Ultimately, she took her own advice, and shared it with others over the years.

“When I had the Waterfront, I thought, ‘There shouldn’t be any restaurants coming up that are the same. Each one has to be a little different.’ And if you can’t do something different, what do you have?” All the restaurants right now on Bay Street are doing a fantastic job. They are all doing something in their own way and their own style. All of Bay Street has really improved. We have a really good three blocks, I think the best on the Oregon coast, because they’re all together. ... You can walk Bay Street and get experiences of different kinds all in one place. That’s

why I love Florence.”

After her presentation, one man spoke up, saying, “You’ve really made Florence a much nicer place to live. You’ve been a great part of this community.”

For more insight into Florence’s entrepreneurial community, RAIN is holding additional events this fall and winter. On Tuesday, Oct. 15, will be an “Art-repreneur” Meetup with artist and innovator Jayne Smoley at The Studios at Jayne Smoley Design, 1458 First St. in Historic Old Town. To sign up or learn more information, visit www.meetup.com/Startup-Florence-Oregon-Coast.

As for RAIN, “What we do, essentially, is help small businesses,” Ruben said. “We specialize best in early stage support, and that’s for anyone, of any age, at any time, who has an idea. If you’re figuring out what to do next or how to bring an idea to fruition, we’re your people, and I’d love to meet with you.”

As a venture catalyst, Ruben said her job is to go into small communities and ignite what’s already there using RAIN’s resources for programs, training, mentors, financial opportunities and physical assets.

“I’m your person if you want to talk or workshop ideas,” she added.

For more information about RAIN, visit oregonrain.org.

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