



# Piecing Together Small Business

Building and Branding Success in HB

By Donna Strong and Jody Robinson

There is often a misconception that people who successfully start and stay in business have found a carefree career path lined with lucky breaks and are blessed with opportune timing. The reality is quite the opposite.

When everything is invested in your own business - time, money, passion and creativity - you rarely, if ever, truly leave the office (at least from a mental standpoint). If you think meeting a boss's demands is a challenge, try tackling your own - particularly when your personal savings are on the line. Especially in the early stages of startup, the workload is often unforgiving as you wear the many hats of entrepreneurship necessary to get the job done: CEO, CFO, HR, sales staff, marketer, manager, etc.

But despite the challenges and obstacles inherent to any entrepreneurial endeavor, most business owners agree that the pros significantly outweigh the cons. A successful operation brings both financial and emotional rewards, offers the freedom of flexibility and provides a creative outlet. Many entrepreneurs are driven by the desire to build something from the ground up, help other people, or leave behind a legacy.

Our community is home to scores of determined individuals who have faced the challenges of starting and growing their own businesses - people who have learned hard lessons, overcome common obstacles and currently reap the rewards of their endeavors.

The following provides snapshots into the diverse businesses representing an ever-increasing number of success stories in our city.

### The Image Center

Owned by Dr. Katherine Ahn and Dr. Peter Newen, the Image Center is a thriving plastic surgery and dental boutique devoted to aesthetics and restoration of the face and body.

Open since 2003, the highly credentialed medical spa and surgery center offers comprehensive services with outstanding client care, including the luxury of a full-service day spa, cosmetic and restorative dental treatments and multi-specialty outpatient surgery services - all within the comfort and convenience of a single, state-of-the-art facility.

The day spa menu encompasses the latest for the skin, face, hair, and body, as



Dr. Katherine Ahn and Dr. Peter Newen

well as wardrobe and fashion consulting for a full-image makeover. Full-scale plastic surgery is offered under the direction of Dr. Peter Newen, coupled with the latest in laser facial rejuvenation and hair removal techniques. Their dental menu uses state-of-the-art technology and treatments that include implant dentistry. The Outpatient Surgery division features a trio of state-of-the-art surgical suites for use by plastic surgeons, ophthalmologists, GI surgeons, orthopedic surgeons, podiatrists, gynecologists and oral surgeons.

"We have only the most highly credentialed, skillful and caring service providers at The Image Center," says Dr. Katherine Ahn. "We are here to form long-term relationships with our clients and to be a leader in aesthetic and restorative care."

Through consistent hard work and continually striving to be the best, Dr. Ahn and Dr. Newen have overcome the early growth challenges inherent in any busi-

ness venture and feel that much of their success can be attributed to staffing their operation with individuals who truly care about their clients.

"We are very excited to be here in Huntington Beach," says Dr. Ahn. "The dynamic nature of the city matches our philosophy: We always strive to grow, develop and change."

### Stone and Ceramic

A full-service tile and stone showroom, Stone and Ceramic opened its doors in January of 2000 and has grown its operation from three employees to 17.

"Starting a business like ours, it is hard to stay within budget," says Owner Mike Faas. "I knew it was going to take a lot of hard work and time sacrifice before I would start to see some reward. I had to be in it for the long run."

Stone and Ceramic's customer base includes contractors, designers and architects, as well as design-minded home owners and carries all types of tile - ceramic, porcelain, metal and glass. With one of the largest selections of tile and natural stone in Southern California, the company also offers an array of medallions, pavers and natural stone and quartz slabs and its expansive warehouse houses both rough materials and finished products for residential construction projects in styles ranging from French Country, Contemporary and Cape Cod to Tuscan, Southwestern and Asian.

With a staff that boasts over 75 years of combined experience in design and problem solving, the company is dedicated to helping their customers find what they are interested in and stay within



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budget. In an ongoing commitment to customer service, Faas and his team routinely provide their customers with referrals to other industry experts, including general contractors, tile contractors, designers and architects.

"Owning your own business is very rewarding," says Faas. "I grew up in this area and I just love everything about the people, the weather and entertainment opportunities of living here. It took some time, but I now have the financial independence I was looking for."

#### Heritage Memorial Services

Many successful business owners truly love what they do for a living, but for a select few, their occupations are more of a calling than a career. Such is the case for Dennis Gallagher, who has nearly five decades of experience in the funeral industry.

In the seven years since he and his wife Linda opened the doors of their boutique mortuary, Heritage Memorial Services has become an industry leader, handling more calls than any other funeral home in the area - a testament to the Gallagher's commitment to caring.



Linda and Dennis Gallagher

Much of their success to date can likely be attributed to what Dennis calls "the next generation of funeral care," which encompasses the highest quality of services and merchandise without high cost, including the production and presentation of memorial (or "life") videos, traditional funeral and graveside services, services for all faiths and traditions, after care services and all cremation options including simple cremations and burials at sea, as well as such unique services as "green" burials.

"We have the ability to accept pre-arrangement plans made elsewhere in the state or anywhere in the country," says Dennis. "Another unique service we offer

is the ability to select a casket without ever having to enter a casket selection room, which can be an incredibly overwhelming experience for families."

Instead, families can view and customize their selections on a state-of-the-art flat screen system.

Heritage Memorial Services is the only mortuary in HB to perform all preparation on its premises. The funeral director and other staff who initially meet with the family are with the family members every step of the way. Because they have a bereavement counselor and chaplain on staff as well, the Gallaghers offer a continuity of care and level of service other funeral homes in the area are unable to meet.

"Real 'care' is vitally important to us," says Linda. "We only hire people who share this philosophy because this business is about serving families, it's not just a profession. It's a ministry."

#### The Beef Palace

The Beef Palace calls to mind the way business was conducted in a simpler time, when customer service, quality product and a hands-on approach by proprietors were the norm, rather than the exception. In operation at the same location for nearly four decades, this community butcher shop is a family business built on a foundation of heritage and tradition.

"Success in this industry lies in the quality and availability of product, but also in sanitation," says Owner Calvin Free. "In fact, sanitation comprises more than half of the day-to-day operation. In order to be in this industry, you have to have a compulsion for cleaning ... you have to be a fanatic about it."

Free adds that butchers typically work the "longest hours of any trade profession" because of the nature of perishable product and attributes his success to cross-training all of his employees so that each staff member is competent in all aspects of the operation.

"In this way, all of the employees are capable of wearing many hats and no one gets bogged down by trying to define their job and they are able to help one another, which makes for a much more efficient business," says Free. "I love working and living here. Huntington Beach is home to some of the sweetest people I've ever met. Although the area is very upscale, the people are gentile and warm. There's a real sense of community here."



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### National Wushu Training Center

If you've seen the movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," you've witnessed the beautiful acrobatic maneuvers, stunning aerials and jumping kicks that characterize traditional Chinese Wushu training.

In operation in Huntington Beach since 1986, The National Wushu Training Center offers individual and group classes to students of all ages from very young children to the elderly. Using Wushu, husband-and-wife team Eric and Debbie Chen are often called on to coordinate and choreograph action martial arts sequences for live shows and motion pictures.

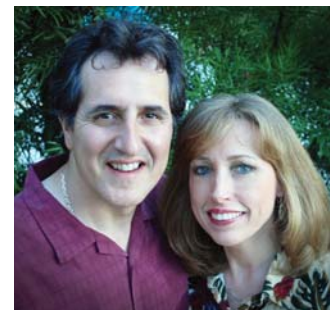
"Eric and I are athletes and aren't necessarily great at the business aspect of the operation so it was a challenge to determine the best avenues for marketing and increasing awareness of what we have to offer," says Chen. "In terms of the most rewarding aspects of owning our own business, Eric and I raised our four children in our facilities and our marriage has grown stronger through working side-by-side each day. In addition, I am extremely proud of our students. I am excited to go to work each day because, particularly in teaching children, we are able to have an enormous impact on their physical, emotional and psychological well-being."

On moving their studio to its current location in the Marina Village Shopping Center at the corner of Springdale and Warner, Chen says they hope to increase visibility and steadily continue to grow the business "in a neighborly fashion."

"Huntington Beach has the greatest atmosphere," says Chen. "The people are super nice and very sports and family-oriented. But no matter where you choose to open your operation, you have to love what you do, be creative and be honest. Whether you're opening a Wushu school or a scrapbooking business, you need to love it to be successful."

### HB Digital Arts

A local landmark operation, HB Digital Arts has operated continuously in the community since 1962. Domenic Iorfino, along with his wife Kristy Selleck Iorfino, took over the helm in 1997 after working as a managing partner for several years.



Domenic Iorfino and Kristy Selleck

The business, which specializes in providing graphic design, custom printing and copying services, can print "almost anything onto almost anything," including catalogs, newsletters, business cards, stationery, flyers, posters and banners.

"The technology in our industry changes at a staggering rate," says Domenic. "We continually upgrade our equipment to introduce new technology that directly benefits our clients. For example, we recently purchased a new large format color printer. With its photo-quality ability, we can provide our clients with better images for presentations."

As a sign of its success, the company relies almost solely on customer referrals and repeat business.

"Domenic and I believe that if we treat clients the way we would like to be treated, then it's a win-win situation," says Kristy. "It's extremely rewarding to know that you've helped a client reach their goal. We consider it an honor when our clients select us as a

partner in providing graphic solutions.”

Domenic and Kristy also acknowledge their outstanding employees (now numbering 13) for their success in the demanding digital print industry, as well as the importance of flexibility.

“Our company has gone through many technical transformations over the years,” says Domenic. “If we had been rigid, we would have sunk a long time ago.”

### The Hair-Do and Threading Salon

Naheed Aziz prides herself on owning a business that “brings out the best in people.”

Aziz, who brings nearly a quarter century of industry experience to her operation, opened her current location in HB a year ago and since that time, has steadily grown her customer base.

“I have been in this business for a long time and I love my work,” says the native Pakistani. “I particularly like being in Huntington Beach, where the people are very friendly, open, helpful and understanding.”



Naheed Aziz

Among the challenges Aziz faced before starting her salon business included “obtaining the necessary financing, finding the right location overcoming the language barrier.

“I have worked day and night to overcome these challenges,” she says. “Though I still work long hours, things have become a lot easier now. There are still some challenges to overcome, but I know that the people who work hard are the people who are successful.”

The salon offers a full menu of hair and skin care services, with the added caring touch of offering privacy to clients who may need some extra attention (such as a person going through chemotherapy) and unique services, including Henna body art and eyebrow threading.

Further, Aziz does her best to accommodate her client’s work schedules by offering late evening appointments.

“You receive more respect and have more freedom to operate, bring in new ideas and techniques, and apply them when you own your own business,” she says. “Never give up, no matter how challenging it might get. Keep working towards your goal. You can achieve anything you want to if you think positively.”

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A fixture in the HB business landscape since 1962, DeGuelle Glass Co. has built and maintained a reputation of quality, service and integrity over the years. Barbara Haynes joined the family operation in 1988 and learned every aspect of its operation over the course of the subsequent nine years. So when the DeGuelle family was ready to turn over the reins, it made perfect sense to sell the business to Barbara and her husband Michael.

"We attribute the success of our company to date to doing the right thing for the customer, charging a fair price and following up with customer service," says Barbara. "We have been around the longest out of all the other glass shops. We don't sub any of our work out - we do everything ourselves."



Michael and Barbara DeGuelle

Barbara and Mike also credit their employees with helping to continually grow the company and add that "almost all of our employess have been with us over 20 years, which really speaks to their dedication."

"We specialize in custom residential work, such as showers, table tops, windows, wardrobe doors, screens and unique patterns of glass for cabinet doors," says Barbara. "We also feature specialty art glass and recently purchased a kiln to experiment with more art glass, making small bowls and plates. We are always looking at new products and ideas that we can offer to our customers." **HB**

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