

Art Class Grows Up

With paintbrushes and a few glasses of wine, two Louisiana women put a creative spin on girls' night out. // BY LOCKE HUGHES //



Their Best Business Advice

→ PUT YOUR IDEA TO THE TEST

After Hurricane Katrina tore through Louisiana in 2005, friends Cathy and Renée felt compelled to help their community recover its spirit. On their morning walks, they'd brainstorm business ventures. "We couldn't agree on an idea until we came up with an art class paired with BYOB wine, which would give people a creative way to burn off stress," recalls Renée, who managed an orthodontic practice at the time. She and Cathy, a caterer, tried out the concept in Cathy's backyard. As an artist friend taught them step by step how to re-create a portrait of a woman, the two followed along and produced frame-worthy paintings. "The idea worked, even for nonartists like us, so we decided to go for it," says Cathy.

→ PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

Before starting the business, Cathy and Renée had collaborated on several successful fundraising projects for

their children's school. "We went into this knowing our strong suits and how to work well as a team, so we respect each other's areas of expertise," says Renée. Cathy, who's more creative, handles marketing and copyrights, while Renée, who's more business-minded, is in charge of finances and personnel.

→ LEARN HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Although they'd known each other for years, Cathy and Renée had to figure out how to translate their friendship into a professional setting. In the beginning, the two shared an office where they were able to bounce ideas off each other constantly, which helped make communication easy. "Even so, there were some misunderstandings that made us realize we needed to go above and beyond in expressing our opinions and feelings to make our company work," says Renée.

→ GIVE BACK TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

"We believe it's not only a good thing to donate to your community, but that it also helps your business expand, since people like to support companies that give back," says Renée. By designating one night a month when at least half the proceeds go to charity, like a local animal shelter or Habitat for Humanity, Painting with a Twist locations have attracted new customers.

→ DON'T LET AGE STOP YOU

"Women need to know that you *can* start a business later in life," says Cathy. At first, she and Renée were simply trying to lift the mood of their community and add to their households' income. "We never thought we would be running such a successful company at our age," says Cathy. "We believe that if you have a great idea for a business, it is never too late!"

Renée Maloney, 43,
(left) and
Cathy Deano, 58,
Mandeville, LA

THEIR BUSINESS

Painting with a Twist, with 62 franchise locations in 15 states

THE CONCEPT

An art class where friends drink a little wine and have a lot of fun while learning to paint

EARNINGS

Over \$1 million in 2011



Customers paint landscapes while sipping and chatting.