

SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS

Maryland has the second highest percentage of women-owned businesses in the country, according to the National Women's Business Council, with about 32.6 percent of firms in the state reportedly owned by women.

Washington, D.C., is No. 1 with 34.5 percent.

Baltimore has the second highest percentage of women-

owned businesses among all cities nationwide, with 36.9 percent — second only to Detroit, where nearly half of all businesses are owned by women.

The Daily Record recently interviewed five female business owners in the Baltimore area to find out how they got their start, what motivated them to launch their own firms and what advice they have for other women just starting out.

LYNNE BRICK

President | Brick Bodies Fitness Services Inc.

Lynne Brick and her husband, Victor, started their first fitness business about three decades ago, renting racquetball courts to hold fitness classes.

They later borrowed \$125,000 from Victor's father to buy the Padonia Fitness Center in 1985.

Now, the pair own 35 fitness clubs, including seven Brick Bodies and Lynne Brick's Women's Health and Fitness locations — making Brick Bodies Fitness Services Inc. one of the top 25 largest health club organizations in the country. The Bricks also have branched out in recent years, opening 28 Planet Fitness franchise locations, most of which are in Maryland.

Seven are out of the state, including their most recent franchise location in Florida.

Lynne Brick said she and Victor decided in 1996 to grow their family — rather than their business.

That included raising their daughter, Vicki, who now is the company's vice president, and their son Jon, who works in the tech industry in California.

Then, in 2007 the couple decided to diversify their business portfolio and bring on the Planet Fitness franchise.

"The brand is very strong," she said. "There's never been one Planet Fitness that's ever closed."

In 2013, the Bricks won Franchise of the Year for the Planet Fitness brand, and this year won awards for opening the most franchises and for having the best club based on corporate inspections.

However, Lynne Brick said the couple has experienced some challenges over the years that they have learned from.

In the beginning, she said the couple did not have a lot of capital.

"We would literally just pray we would make payroll," she said.

She suggests that new business owners get very familiar with their numbers, take on invested partners and hire great staff. Above all, she said, love what you do.

BARB CLAPP

President & CEO | Clapp Communications

Barb Clapp's passion for advertising dates back to her childhood, when she would go through magazines to look at the ads.

Later, after years working in the media industry, Clapp said she wanted to start her own business, but wasn't sure "what that looked like."

She said it was the death of her publisher and mentor and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that prompted her to start her own business. Clapp Communications in Baltimore launched 13 years ago. "Life is short," Clapp said. "So, I did it. And it was very scary."

Clapp launched her firm in her attic with a computer, a phone and a list of people she knew.

She wrote letters to past clients asking them to consider working with her and also to refer people to her new business.

She got two clients simultaneously — Comcast and a health insurance firm that later sold to Nationwide Insurance — and her business took off from there. She now has 10 employees and a lot of big-name clients.

Clapp is expanding her business as well, recently earning the ability to compete for federal contracts.

"It's a hunting license," she said. "It allows you to look for business in the federal government stratosphere. That's a



whole other area of growth."

For other women thinking of starting their own firms, Clapp recommends they maintain their integrity, embrace hard work and surround themselves with a great staff as she has.

"I have all superstars in my opinion," Clapp said.

VERONICA COOL

CEO & Founder | Cool & Associates LLC

Veronica Cool made a name for herself working for 11 years at Wells Fargo as a business banker and an unofficial liaison to the Hispanic community.

In January, she pursued a long-time dream and started her own corporate marketing and outreach firm, Cool & Associates LLC, which focuses on reaching Hispanic consumers.

Cool, who originally is from the Dominican Republic, is a past chairwoman of the Maryland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and said many of the organization's corporate partners would ask how to market goods and services to the

Hispanic community.

"I found myself giving away a lot of education for free," Cool said.

She said her desire to spend more time with her children, who were starting middle school, and to use her knowledge of the market were the genesis for Cool & Associates.

She describes the firm now as a "one-



woman show," and Cool uses subcontractors for different jobs as needed. Among the lessons she has learned in starting her own business are to value yourself, Cool said — something women

often struggle with.

She also suggests being strategic, staying organized and being resourceful.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help," Cool said. "It only makes you stronger."

Cool also has set some aggressive goals, giving herself 10 years to be successful and profitable, while also adding economic value to the state and supporting her core audience.

ABIGAIL FREDERICK

Owner | Haute Blow Dry Bars

Abigail Frederick moved to Maryland from California about four years ago.

Looking for a new career path, Frederick said she realized that the blow dry bars that were common in California had not yet made their way to the Baltimore area.

In 2013 she opened two locations for her Haute Blow Dry Bars chain, one in Towson and the other in Baltimore city's Harbor East area.

"I've always been pretty entrepreneurial," she said. "All of the pieces just fell into place."

She now employs about 20 people across both locations and said she is expanding to include a mobile styling business as well.

One of her main obstacles when starting her business has been staffing, Frederick said.

"I wish I had a more developed plan for hiring from the beginning and a better understanding of [the pool of applicants]



I was hiring from," she said. "I didn't realize the challenges."

Frederick said starting her own business was a little like having a baby.

"People warn you about different things, but it's not until you jump in and face different issues for yourself that you understand," she said.

LISA PHILLIPS

Owner | Celebrate Us

While enrolled in the University of Baltimore/Towson University MBA program, Lisa Phillips made a gift basket for her final exam project for a marketing course.

That gift basket was the first of many Phillips has made, later launching her own online store, Celebrate Us, which specializes in custom gift baskets.

"After my presentation I had six orders for baskets," Phillips said.

She then spent 2012 turning her hobby into a successful business, conducting surveys and focus groups and looking for ways to mass produce her products.

"My business is really taking off," she said. "I'm really very proud that something that was a hobby I've been able to turn into a business."

Phillips recently earned a contract

with Towson University and said officials with the university now are talking with her about the possibility of her opening a physical location in the campus' new student union.

For now, she said, her business is primarily serving other businesses, including Girl Scouts of America and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. However, she does some consumer-based business and has shipped orders out-of-state.

Phillips attributes her success in part to her focus on learning her industry, investing in her product and successful marketing.

"One of the things that I realized is if you produce a good product, people are willing to pay and they don't question the cost," she said.

She also recommends that entrepreneurs have fun.

"Having your own business requires so much work, but you need to have fun, and that's the one thing I don't forget. I have fun making gift baskets."

Going forward, Phillips said she is considering expanding into food service.

