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Women Breaking Ground: A Website Profiling Women Entrepreneurs in Syracuse

Jill Comoletti
Syracuse University

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Abstract

My Honors Capstone project is a website titled Women Breaking Ground (www.womenbreakingground.com). On my website, I published 10 feature-length profiles on women entrepreneurs in Syracuse. Each profile features photographs and an interactive map to show readers the location of the woman-owned business. This project is relevant because the number of women business owners in the United States is increasing; in fact, women are opening 1,200 new businesses every day. I hope that my project inspires even more women to pursue their passion and become entrepreneurs.

Executive Summary

For my Honors Capstone project, I created a website titled Women Breaking Ground (www.womenbreakingground.com). On the site, I posted 10 feature-length profiles of women entrepreneurs in Syracuse, each detailing a woman's journey to opening her own business. I met with each woman at her place of work, and talked with her for a length of time ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours. I then photographed each woman entrepreneur. When possible, I took photos of her shop, as well. Once the interview process was complete, I wrote an approximately 1,000-word profile for each entrepreneur and posted the profiles on the website. I placed photos throughout the stories, and at the end of each piece, I included the business's address and website. I also included a map to show its location. In order to write the profiles, I recorded each interview and then took notes on the recordings to simplify the writing process.

As an example, I will explain my process of interviewing Donna Curtin, owner of Grace Auto Body and Paint. I sent an email to Donna explaining my project and my desire to interview her, and she agreed to set up a meeting time. We talked for two hours in her office, and she both laughed and cried while talking about her journey to success. Afterward, she gave me a tour of the auto body shop, and I took some photographs. I also photographed Donna standing beside her favorite old car. She said she was so glad to tell her story to someone and said she was excited that I'd be sharing it with the public. I took about a week to write the story, which included information about Donna's childhood, her college years, her first few jobs, the challenges of opening an auto shop as a woman, and the many successes she's had thus far.

In order to complete this project, I built a website through Weebly. First, I chose a layout that I thought would fit the project's content. I didn't want the profiles to be in blog format on one scrolling page, so I chose a layout that allowed me to create separate pages for each story. I

then decided on a red and gold color scheme, because those colors are vibrant enough to catch someone's attention, but not bright enough to be distracting. I gave a brief summary of my project on the home page, then created an "About" page to further explain my goals. I also created a "Contact" page so readers could send me an email if they had comments about my stories. Women Breaking Ground has a Twitter page as well, where I've tweeted out links to each profile I've written. I've also tweeted other information regarding business and entrepreneurs that I thought would interest my followers. Twitter and email widgets exist on the homepage of Women Breaking Ground for easy access.

This project is significant because the number of women business owners is rising steadily in the United States. According to American Express, there are 9.1 million women-owned businesses in the country today, an increase from 8.6 million in 2013. This number is especially visible in New York State, where women own more than 30 percent of all businesses. On an even more specific level, Syracuse is one of 16 cities where women's average income is higher than men's, according to Lisa Evan's article for *Fast Company*. The city also has a variety of resources for women entrepreneurs, including the WISE Women's Business Center and Women's Business Opportunities Connections. Many of these women business owners have told me that they want to spread the word about their business and expand their customer base, but they're having trouble. For example, the owner of Ms. Echols Gourmet Wholesale Desserts told me that she's desperately looking for someone to help her with the manufacturing side of business, so she can have more time to market her product and drum up sales. By creating Women Breaking Ground, I am hopefully giving these women more publicity and catching the eye of potential customers. In the end, my main goal is to highlight women in our community

who are making a difference with their ventures, and who are paving the way for future women entrepreneurs.

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my wonderful advisor, Professor Harriet Brown, for guiding me through this project. She helped me to stay organized and always had great advice whenever I had an issue.

I'd also like to thank my reader, Professor Melissa Chessher, for providing such helpful feedback on my reflective essay. Finally, I want to thank my family and friends, who always read my profiles and gave me encouragement.

Reflective Essay

My project, entitled “Women Breaking Ground,” (www.womenbreakingground.com) is a compilation of 10 written profiles on women entrepreneurs in Syracuse. These women all come from different backgrounds, but they share one thing in common: their desire to pursue their passions, despite the challenges standing in their way. With women starting approximately 1,200 businesses per day in the United States, it makes sense to shine a spotlight on some of these entrepreneurial women in Syracuse. My goal for Women Breaking Ground is to show readers the power of women in business, and hopefully to inspire other women to take the leap and start their own businesses, as well.

I was drawn to the topic during summer 2014, when I was an editorial intern at the website Business Insider in New York City. I was responsible for pitching multiple story ideas to my editor every morning, so I was always on the lookout for inspiration. One day, while walking in the SoHo neighborhood, a storefront caught my eye. The shop was called Bucketfeet, and its interior featured bright white walls lined with colorful shoes. I’d never heard of the brand, and began researching Bucketfeet when I got home. I found out that Bucketfeet shoes are designed by local artists from around the world, meaning that each shoe has an artistic backstory. At work the next morning, I asked my editor if I could profile one of the men who started the business, and she said yes.

Talking to Raaja Nemani, Bucketfeet co-founder and CEO, was an exhilarating experience. His excitement about the brand was contagious, and he couldn’t wait to tell me the story of the company’s founding. As it turns out, this story involved backpacking around the world, moving back to Chicago from the Middle East, and building up Bucketfeet from

absolutely nothing. After this conversation, I became fascinated with entrepreneurs; I loved that a simple business concept could have such vibrant stories and challenges behind it.

This excitement is what drew me to entrepreneurs. It can be very frustrating when you interview a source for a story, and it is clear that they don't want to talk to you. For example, I interviewed a source for a story last year, and it was clear that he felt our conversation was a waste of his time; he kept checking his watch and giving me one-word answers. As someone who still gets nervous for interviews, this kind of attitude is upsetting. However, I found that every time I interviewed an entrepreneur, they were very eager to discuss the rewards and challenges of owning their business.

I wrote several other entrepreneur profiles that summer, and when I returned to Syracuse for senior year, I didn't want to stop writing them. The Honors Capstone project seemed like the perfect outlet to continue writing the stories I loved to tell. I knew I needed a more specific focus than just "entrepreneurs," so I started brainstorming ways to narrow my idea. I realized that most of the entrepreneurs I'd interviewed over the summer were men. After doing some research, I found that though men were in the majority when it came to entrepreneurship, women were making great strides. A report released by American Express in 2014 stated that there are 9.1 million women-owned businesses in the United States, an increase from 8.6 million in 2013. I also found that Syracuse is one of sixteen U.S. cities where women's average income is higher than men's, according to *Fast Company*. I visited the WISE Women's Business Center and spoke with the director, who told me about the rapid increase in women business owners in Syracuse. Armed with these statistics, I felt confident that I could center my capstone on women entrepreneurs in Syracuse.

I started talking with friends, faculty members, and city residents to find women entrepreneurs in the community with whom I could speak. I vividly remember the first interview for my capstone when I spoke with Laura Serway and Cindy Seymour, owners of Laci's Tapas Bar. That experience reassured me that I'd chosen the right path for my capstone project. The couple had so many stories to tell—both funny and heartbreaking—about their journey as restaurant entrepreneurs. Their colorful personalities made writing this first article especially enjoyable. Once I posted the finished article online, Laura and Cindy shared it on their website, which gave my project hundreds of new views. I couldn't wait to continue.

My main goal for this project is to make a difference in people's lives through my writing—whether it's by generating publicity for women-owned businesses in Syracuse, or by encouraging other women to start their own businesses. While this might be a lofty goal, I received some encouragement along the way that indicated that I was making a difference. The most memorable moment of this was after I interviewed Donna Curtin, owner of Grace Auto Body and Paint. Her story was particularly touching; after she told me about the harassment and discrimination she faced when trying to open her shop, she described how thrilled she was when the construction of Grace Auto Body finally concluded. By this point in her story, we were both crying. After about two hours of talking, Donna gave me a hug and thanked me. She was so glad to have the chance to tell her story, and was also glad that the public would get to read about it. Knowing that I gave her a platform to share her experiences was a wonderful feeling.

My vision for Women Breaking Ground changed and developed frequently because of my courses at Syracuse University. The class that had the strongest influence on my project was "MAG 406: Magazine Article Writing," which I took in the fall of my senior year. When I started this class, my capstone idea wasn't fully fleshed out yet—I knew I wanted to write about

entrepreneurs in Syracuse, but that was it. Within the first week of this class we chose a specific topic, and by the end of the semester we needed to write a 3,000-word article about that topic. Since I already knew my capstone would focus on entrepreneurs in Syracuse, I decided to choose a similar topic for the article. However, just writing about “entrepreneurs in Syracuse” was too vague for the assignment—to make the article interesting, it needed to have a relevant peg for readers. Was the number of entrepreneurs in a certain industry (food, clothing, etc.?) increasing more quickly than in other industries? Was entrepreneurship on the rise in Syracuse more so than other cities in the Northeast?

To find answers to these questions, I had coffee with Chris Fowler, executive director of SyracuseFirst, which is a non-profit that promotes local business in Syracuse. One of the first things he mentioned to me was the noticeable rise in the number of women entrepreneurs in Syracuse during the past few years. He started listing off several women-owned businesses, like Laci’s Tapas Bar and Indie Kids (both of which I ended up featuring in my project). Excited about this possibility, I went home and looked up the national statistics for women entrepreneurs and saw that numbers were skyrocketing. I knew I had my idea—for both my article writing class and my Honors Capstone. For my writing class, I decided to focus on the rise of women entrepreneurs in Syracuse and how local business incubators are facilitating that experience for women. For my capstone, I focused on individual women entrepreneurs in Syracuse and wrote feature-length profiles.

The great thing about having a similar topic for both my article writing class and my capstone was that there was a lot of overlap in terms of research. For example, one of the assignments in my class was to write a profile on a person related to our final article project. I chose to write mine on Courtnee Futch, a student entrepreneur who started her own bakery

business called ThunderCakes. She had such a vibrant personality, and her story was so inspirational that I decided to use it as part of my capstone project, as well. My conversation with Courtnee led to her introducing me to Lindsay Wickham, an employee at the Falcone Center for Entrepreneurship at Syracuse University. She told me about the RvD IDEA Awards—a major opportunity for student entrepreneurs at Syracuse who present their ideas for a chance to receive funding from the RvD IDEA business accelerator. After learning about this, I spoke with three employees of IDEA who gave me statistics on how many women receive awards from the competition. All of these people suggested I speak with Joanne Lenweaver, director of the WISE Women’s Business Center in Syracuse. Joanne gave me great information about how many more women are visiting the center now versus 10 years ago. All of these meetings allowed me to gather more and more information about the growing group of women entrepreneurs in the city, and they never would’ve happened if I hadn’t taken my article writing class. Also, that class and “MAG 408: Magazine Editing” gave me the knowledge to properly structure my profiles for my capstone project. In both classes, I learned how to draw the reader into the story with an action-packed lead (or introduction) and an open-ended conclusion. I also learned how to choose the most emotional, provoking quotes, and how to effectively find sources for articles.

I also think the news writing and reporting classes I took during freshman and sophomore year deserve a nod. These are the classes that developed my reporting skills. They made it possible for me to begin to consider this project. When I first started at Newhouse, I was very shy and afraid of interviewing people. While I loved the writing portion of reporting, I dreaded interviews. One day in my news writing class during freshman year, I confided my fear in my professor, who is a copy editor for the Post Standard. He told me that my fear was normal—in fact, he still gets nervous before interviews. He said the only way I’d get over my fear was to

interview people all the time. Eventually, it will become something done so frequently that it's comfortable for me. His words rang true during my time at Newhouse; I gradually became less afraid of talking with people. During this project, I even started to look forward to interviews. Instead of focusing on fear, I was able to focus on the fascinating stories of each subject.

My Newhouse capstone class, "ICC 300: Multimedia Projects," has also helped me develop my capstone. In this class, each student needs to write, design, and photograph a story for an iPad app that we're creating called The Slice. This didn't directly help with my capstone research, but it allowed me to practice writing and designing for a digital audience. It also allowed me to hone my photography skills, which were a major part of my capstone; for each profile, I included photographs of the subject and of their business, if possible.

Additionally, "COM 427: Social Media for Communicators" was a great opportunity to build my social media skills for this project. This class taught me how to write exciting tweets and Facebook posts, and how to increase followers through hashtags and engagement. We even had the chance to create a social media strategy for an education company based in New York City, which helped me to further understand the importance of online engagement. These skills proved to be very important, because social media played a major role in spreading the news about my project.

Because I wanted my project to be visible to a wide audience, I chose to publish Women Breaking Ground online. According to Andrea Caumont's article for the Pew Research Center, approximately 50 percent of the public uses the Internet as their main source of news. When I first started my project, I had many friends and family members who expressed interest in reading my profiles. However, since these people live all over the country, there's no way they would be able to read a hard copy. Publishing online made it easy for me to share this work with

them. It also allowed these women entrepreneurs to share my profiles with their clients; the majority of women that I interviewed posted a link to my project on either their website or their social media accounts. When they did this, the views on womenbreakingground.com skyrocketed, sometimes to more than 200 views in a day. Having a website also makes it simple for people to reach out to me with comments. I have a page on the website titled, “Contact,” which allows readers to email me directly from the page. Once, I received an email from a man in Seattle, Washington, who said he loved my profile on Indie Kids, and that he wished a similar store would open in Seattle. To know that my work was spreading across the country was inspiring, and motivated me to work even harder than before.

Social media is the main contributor to the spread of Women Breaking Ground. According to Pew, 74 percent of online adults use social networking sites, and 41 percent of total users are curating content. This means they are reposting content created by other people. Because social media plays such a large role in news distribution, I knew Women Breaking Ground needed an outlet of its own. I created a Twitter page for my project, and began tweeting out links to my articles as they were published. I’d also tweet links to articles that I thought would be relevant to followers; for example, I recently retweeted an article from *Entrepreneur* magazine explaining how to function as a woman in a male-dominated startup. To build my follower base, I followed many local Twitter accounts, including the WISE Women’s Business Center, Syracuse.com, and more. I also retweeted several of Women Breaking Ground’s tweets on my own Twitter feed, which initiated some engagement. I chose to make a Twitter account because, according to an article by Amy Mitchell for Pew, Twitter’s news consumers are younger and more educated than Facebook’s news consumers.

As mentioned earlier, Women Breaking Ground spread even more when the women I interviewed posted my profiles on their Facebook and Twitter accounts. For example, when Helen Carter (owner of Secret Lentil Clothing) posted my profile about her on Facebook, it got 42 likes, 12 shares, and 7 comments. Thanks to this sharing environment, Women Breaking Ground has received approximately 1,300 total views. I use a tool called StatCounter, which allows me to monitor how many people are viewing my website, what pages they're viewing, and where those people are from. This helped me gauge which profiles were getting a lot of attention, and which weren't. If I noticed a specific profile was lacking in views, I would try tweeting another link with a slightly different description in an attempt to catch the attention of readers. None of this would have been possible if my project had been printed on paper.

While the shareable nature of online articles was convenient, I also enjoyed writing my project in an online format because it gave me unlimited space and possibilities. On paper, writers need to be very conscious of word count because too few words means lots of white space on the page, and too many words means too little space on the page. But online, the page designs itself around your word count. Some of my profiles were more than 1,000 words and featured many photographs, while others hovered around 700 words and had fewer images. Either way, the profiles looked wonderful on the computer screen. I also enjoyed the ability to add links and interactive maps to all of my profiles. After reading a profile on a woman's specific business, readers will most likely want to visit that business's webpage or social media account. They might also want directions to the business so they can visit themselves. For this reason, I included the name, address, website, and phone number for each woman-owned business. I also included a map for readers to see exactly where the business is located in

Syracuse and visualize how far they'd need to travel in order to visit. Such interactive elements would have been impossible in a non-digital project.

In order to even write these profiles, I needed to overcome a handful of challenges. Probably one of the most frustrating challenges was finding interview subjects. Unfortunately, there is no database listing every women-owned business in Syracuse. I mostly relied on expert sources to give me suggestions about whom I should interview. My most helpful resource for this was the WISE Women's Business Center, which lists some women business owners on its webpage. Some of the women I found through this site were Charlene Barnes of Ms. Echols Gourmet Wholesale Desserts; Mary Price of Kilnfusion Studio; and Donna Curtin of Grace Auto Body. The other way I found sources was simply through word of mouth. When my friends and professors heard about my project, they began telling me about different women-owned businesses that they'd visited. For example, Karen Hall, assistant director of civic engagement and academic advising for the Renée Crown Honors Program, told me about her friend Helen Carter, who sews clothing for her business Secret Lentil. This ended up being one of my favorite interviews for the project.

Another challenge I faced was that sometimes, after an interview, I would realize that my subject wasn't as interesting as I'd hoped. While every woman I interviewed was inspiring and passionate about their business, some had more intriguing stories than others. I first encountered this issue after I'd finished an interview with one of my first profile subjects. I sat down, transcribed the interview, and started to write the article. As I looked for an exciting moment to begin the story with, I realized there weren't many exciting moments to work with. When I finished writing the article, it was only about 600 words—much less than most of my other profiles. I panicked and asked my advisor for advice. She told me that some profiles could be

shorter than others, as long as I compensated with photographs. Luckily, I had many photographs of this woman's shop, which allowed me to place a large photo below every paragraph in the story. This gave readers the illusion that the story was longer and also made it more visually pleasing.

Another related challenge that I faced was the inability to get photographs of some shops. In some cases, like with Charlene Barnes of Ms. Echols, the shop was under construction and couldn't be photographed. In other cases, like with Lilibeth Northern of Uno, Dos, Tres...Let's Talk, the women worked remotely and didn't have a shop to photograph. To solve this issue, I either asked the women to send me older photos of their shop (if it was under construction or inaccessible for some reason), or just photographed the subject and accepted the fact that some of the profiles would be text heavy.

It was also difficult when my subjects asked me to change certain words within the profiles. For example, after reading my finished profile, Lilibeth Northern asked me to refer to her as "Lilibeth" instead of "Northern" throughout the profile. However, AP Style mandates that I refer to subjects by their last name after first reference. I told her I couldn't change it. It's difficult to say no to my subjects when they ask for a writing change, but if it's factually or stylistically correct, I feel obligated to keep the profile as is. The only time I changed the profiles after publication was if there was a factual error.

Creating the Women Breaking Ground website also presented the challenge of designing the site. Once I decided to publish my project in a digital format, I began looking for a website builder that wouldn't involve much coding, but would also allow me to heavily customize my site. I ended up choosing Weebly as my platform because it had many template options and offered straightforward instructions about how to create a website. I chose a template with room

for a large photograph on the homepage that would allow me to display one of the 10 women entrepreneurs at work and catch the attention of readers. I also chose my template because it had very clear menu buttons; I wanted readers to know exactly what to click when they wanted to read a profile, read about my project, and contact me. Choosing the name of my project was also a challenge. I needed to convey the idea of my whole project in a short, punchy phrase. I decided on Women Breaking Ground because it illustrated that these women were breaking into a territory previously dominated by men, and that this is something to celebrate.

Another very challenging part of my project was sticking to my self-imposed deadlines throughout the 2014-15 academic year. My goal was to post a profile online every other week (excluding school breaks), which would've allowed me to finish by February 2015. However, my senior year was very difficult academically. It often was a challenge to balance my capstone work with my coursework — especially when my coursework was due every week, and my capstone wasn't due until April. I set up a calendar that alerted me of capstone deadlines and shared it with my advisor so she could monitor my progress. When I finished a profile, I would send it to my advisor, who would edit it before I uploaded it to the Women Breaking Ground website. Though I didn't finish by my expected date of February 28, I managed to stay relatively on track and finish only three weeks later. I am thankful that I started my project last September and pushed forward despite my other academic challenges. It saved me from doing an unbearable amount of work this spring.

Now that my project is finished, I am very proud of how well it reflects my vision. Every profile that I published exemplifies the different challenges that accompany starting a business. Some women, like Donna Curtin of Grace Auto Body, faced discrimination because of their gender when pursuing their ideas. Other women, like Helen Carter of Secret Lentil, struggled to

balance all of the responsibilities that come along with owning a business on their own. And others, like Michelle Brancaccio of Indie Kids, worry about paying rent for their shop every month. But all of these women pushed forward despite these challenges, and now they own successful businesses. I also managed to diversify my pool of subjects with women of different ages and backgrounds. It was important to me that readers understand that the increase in women-owned businesses isn't limited to a specific type of entrepreneur. By reading these profiles, I hope that women readers see themselves reflected in one or more of these entrepreneurs, and that they are inspired to pursue their business dreams, as well.

My photographs also play a role in the successful fulfillment of my vision. While words are arguably the most important part of profiles, I think it's helpful for readers to be able to visualize each woman entrepreneur and her respective business because it strengthens the connection between the audience and the entrepreneur. One profile that used photographs effectively was the profile about Helen Carter of Secret Lentil. Her shop in the Delavan Center was so colorful and reflective of her personality that I took more than 30 pictures. The ones I chose to include in the profile matched well with the text; for example, after the paragraph about her sewing machine tattoo, I included a photograph of the mint-colored sewing machine that inspired the tattoo. I feel that people who read her profile—and the others on Women Breaking Ground that include several photographs—will get a great sense of each woman's personality.

The online format of Women Breaking Ground also fulfilled my vision because it allowed my project to reach a wide audience. Because my main goal was to inspire other women to open businesses, it was imperative that I make my project accessible to readers. Having all of my profiles on a website made it simple to share them via social media and also to receive feedback. I recently received a comment from a Newhouse student via the "Contact" page on my

site. She said she'd never heard of most of the entrepreneurs on my page. She was so glad to learn about these Syracuse businesses and said she couldn't wait to read more. Knowing that I've influenced even one person with my profiles is enough to reassure me that my project fulfilled its purpose.

I also feel that my interviews—which were the backbone of this entire project—fulfilled my vision of Women Breaking Ground. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of readers, but also in the lives of my subjects. Whether it was a hug at the end of the interview, or a lovely email thanking me for my article, my subjects often indicated that my project positively affected them. For example, after writing about Michelle Brancaccio of Indie Kids, she sent me an email that read:

“Hi Jill,

You totally captivated me! I can't thank you enough for taking the time out and showing an interest in Indie Kids! What a wonderful job you did! I can't wait to share it on social media as long as it is okay with you. Reading such a wonderful article like that reminds of why I went in business! Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!! I hope to see you again, stop in anytime.”

Hearing that my project reminded someone of why they went into business made me feel that Women Breaking Ground was actually making a difference.

Eight months and thousands of words later, I've finally completed Women Breaking Ground—a project that proves that the national increase in women entrepreneurs is strongly reflected in our small city of Syracuse. Whether they're opening restaurants, glass-fusing workshops, or auto repair shops, these women are changing the landscape of business. I'm honored to publish this project in recognition of these entrepreneurs.

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Appendices

Screenshots of the “Home” page and “About” pages.



In New York State, women own **more than 30 percent** of all businesses. This number increased by approximately 73 percent between 1997 and 2014. If you take a look around our community, you'll likely see proof of this statistic every day—Syracuse is actually **one of sixteen cities** in the United States where women's average income is higher than men's. Women Breaking Ground showcases women who are making a difference in the community through their business ventures .

From mid-October to the beginning of March, Women Breaking Ground will profile ten successful women entrepreneurs in the Syracuse area. We'll tell the fascinating stories of how these women successfully pursued their dreams, and all of the highlights and challenges they faced along the way.

This is a Capstone project by Jill Comoletti for Syracuse University's Renée Crown Honors Program.

Screenshot of the Laci's Tapas Bar profile:**A.****The Ladies of Laci's****Laura Serway and Cindy Seymour of Laci's Tapas Bar****By Jill Comoletti**

Cindy Seymour stands behind the bar and dries another glass. She wears a cherry-colored shirt with black buttons, her name emblazoned across the right side of her chest in bright italic script. A beige baseball cap obscures her short wheat-colored hair. She speaks with her twinkling eyes transfixed on her wife, Laura Serway, who sits across the bar. "We have laughed for 33 years because she's so damn funny," Seymour says, smiling at Serway. "We go to bed laughing and we wake up laughing." Serway smiles back, reaching her hand behind her dark oval glasses to wipe her eyes. "We have some fun together," she says, her voice wobbling with emotion.

Screenshots of the Indie Kids profile:

A.



Tiny Trends

Michelle Brancaccio of Indie Kids

By Jill Comoletti

Michelle Brancaccio is cutting strips of bright felt when a dark-haired woman enters her shop. Brancaccio places her scissors on the counter and greets the woman with a wide smile, stepping out from behind the cash register. Her long blonde is a bright pop of color against her oversize black and gray sweater. "Can I help you find something?" she asks. The customer is looking for a dressy shirt for her daughter. Brancaccio and her customer begin to search the store, examining several tiny shirts. "Oh, that shirt would be perfect if it didn't have a tutu attached," Brancaccio says, pausing at a gold-laced black outfit.

B.



The bell above the front door jingles, and a man in a long jacket enters the store. "Do you have any stuff for a four-month-old dude?" he asks. Brancaccio puts down her scissors and points to a variety of items: a green plaid jacket, a newsboy hat, a tiny t-shirt. "And check out the Made in Syracuse onesies up front," she says with a smile, picking up her scissors again and slicing into another piece of felt.

Screenshots of the Secret Lentil profile:**A.****WOMEN BREAKING GROUND**

HOME ABOUT PROFILES CONTACT

**Threading A Story**

Helen Carter of Secret Lentil

By Jill Comoletti

B.

Carter loves her job, but she faces challenges as a non-traditional entrepreneur who runs her own business and creates every item she sells. It's difficult for her to get advice on running a small business because most other businesses are run by more than one person. She also doesn't have traditional business goals like growing and selling Secret Lentil or receiving a bank loan. To balance all the work on her own, Carter totally immerses herself in her business, and doesn't make distinctions between what is and isn't work. "I don't *feel* like it's something I need to get away from because it's *not* something I need to get away from," she says. "That could also be a level of crazy-making, but I've just sort of decided this is what I do, and that is what it looks like."

Screenshots of the Calico Gals profile:

A.

WOMEN BREAKING GROUND

HOME ABOUT PROFILES CONTACT



Patching Together Success

Janet Lutz of Calico Gals

By Jill Comoletti

B.

At the back of the spacious, sunlight-soaked Calico Gals shop exists a long classroom filled with white sewing machines. Laughter and chatting from the room echoes throughout the shop, and becomes more audible as you enter the area beside the classroom known as the "family room": a kitchen space filled with snacks and stray pieces of fabric.

Upon entering the classroom, Janet Lutz, owner of the Calico Gals quilting and sewing shop, greets the three older women participating in this sewing get-together. These women meet every other Friday and call themselves the NUTZ group. "They bring food, they stay all day," explains Lutz, "they sang Christmas carols today—"

"We sang *quilters'* Christmas carols," says Karen Barden, who runs the NUTZ group. She points at a sheet of paper with Christmas song lyrics altered to include popular quilting terms. "And we probably didn't sing them very well, either," says one of the women in the class. The entire room bursts out laughing.

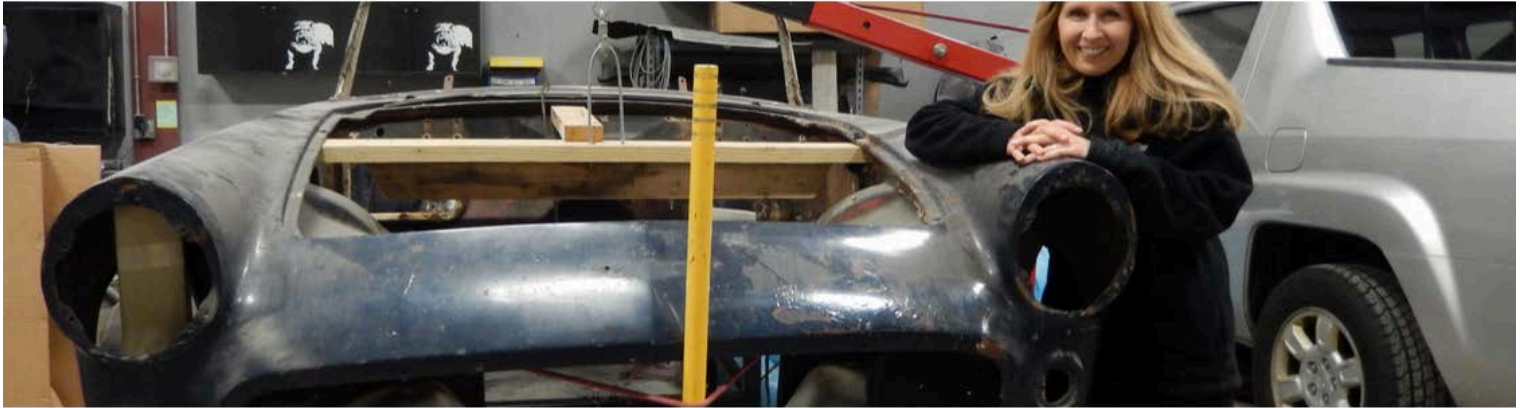


Screenshots of the Grace Auto Body and Paint profile:

A.

WOMEN BREAKING GROUND

HOME ABOUT PROFILES CONTACT



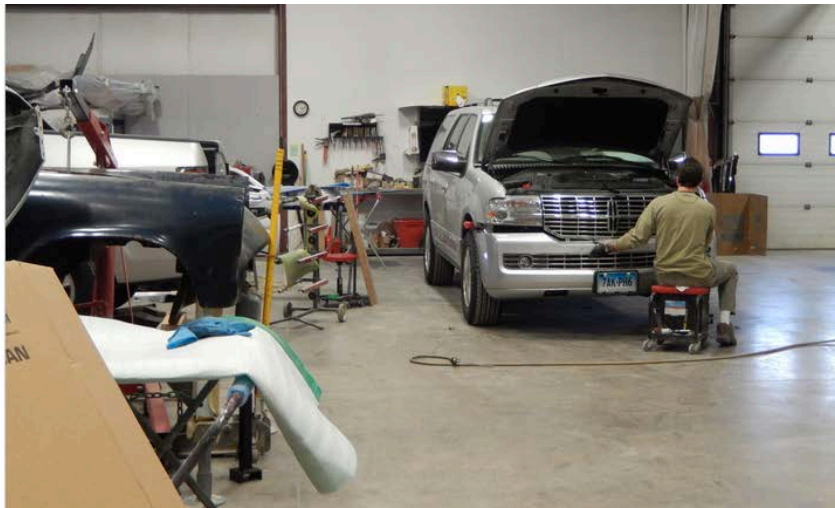
Handled With Grace

Donna Curtin of Grace Auto Body and Paint

By Jill Comoletti

In the garage of Grace Auto Body and Paint, several cars wait for repair. A silver Hyundai sedan sits in the spray booth, waiting for a fresh coat of paint. A mechanic pops open the hood of a Lincoln SUV's hood and fiddles with parts inside. But one car is unlike the rest. It sits against the wall of the garage, covered by a heavy brown tarp. Donna Curtin, the owner of Grace Auto Body, hurries over to the tarp and begins slowly peeling it backwards, revealing a black hood and circular headlights. This is a 1963 Studebaker Avanti, and it's Curtin's dream car.

B.



Though the shop was finally built, Curtin faced some challenges in getting her business up and running. When she applied for a permit, the man handling the process threatened to not give it to her unless she had drinks with him. Also, when Curtin told a group of workers that she would help finish the drywall in the building, they told another employee at National Structures that they refused to take orders from a woman. Curtin once again took matters into her own hands and did everything herself: she finished the drywall, put in the cabinets and hardware, laid the floors. "When I first started to lay the floors, which I knew nothing about, I glued my hair to the tile," she says, laughing.

Once her shop opened in 2003, she faced some discrimination when trying to build up her customer base. Many husbands would get mad at their wives for taking their cars to Grace Auto Body because it was run by a woman. "We've had customers come here based on recommendations from other customers. When they find out my shop manager, Greg, is not the owner, they've taken their estimates out the door, never to be seen again," Curtin says.

Screenshot of the Ms. Echols Gourmet Wholesale Desserts profile:

A.



Sweet Dreams

Charlene Echols-Barnes of Ms. Echols Gourmet Wholesale Desserts

By Jill Comoletti

One of the strongest memories from Charlene Echols-Barnes's childhood is the scent of caramel popcorn. The sweet smell lingered in the air by the Loews movie theater (now the Landmark Theatre) in downtown Syracuse, where Barnes and her sister frequently attended movies while growing up. One street over from the theater stood a caramel popcorn shop, and the siblings made a habit of stopping by the shop and buying 10-cent bags stuffed with popcorn crumbs.

Screenshots of the Kilnfusion Studio profile:

A.



Glass Half Full

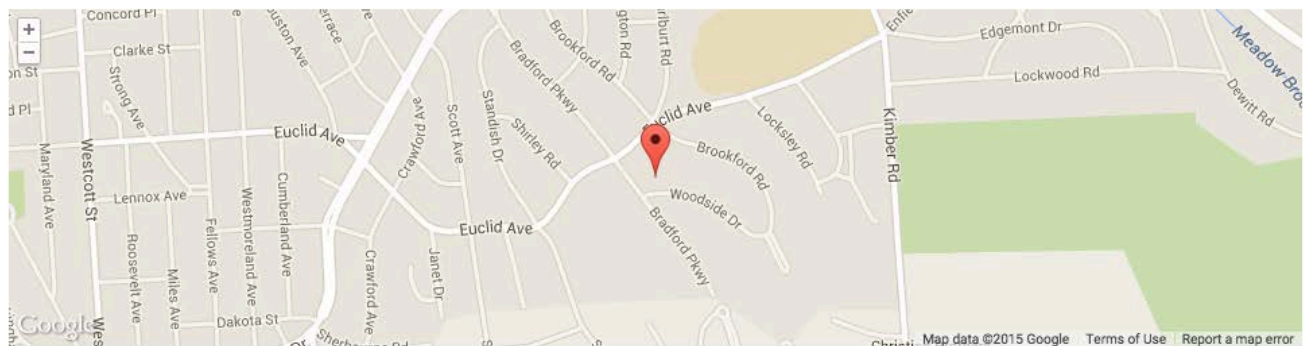
Mary Price of Kilnfusion Studio

By Jill Comoletti

Mary Price enters her basement workshop and walks toward the back corner, passing a wall covered in brightly colored glass fish. She pauses in front of a silver box. "I think this is about done," she says, opening its lid. At the bottom of the box is a square glass plate, its edges slightly upturned. It is streaked with shades of red, orange, yellow, blue, and green.

B.

Kilnfusion Studio
101 Woodside Drive
Syracuse, NY 13224
www.kilnfusionstudio.com



Screenshot of the Uno, Dos, Tres...Let's Talk profile:

A.



Easy As One, Two, Three

Lilibeth Northern of Uno, Dos, Tres...Let's Talk

By Jill Comoletti

When Lilibeth Northern attended the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza, Spain, there were only 22 students in her plant breeding master's program. But those 22 students hailed from 18 different countries, filling the program with a mix of languages and cultures. After spending time with her classmates, Northern realized the importance of breaking down language barriers to help people better understand the experiences of others.

Screenshots of the J. Luxe Salon profile:

A.



Shear Determination

Jillain Salomone of J. Luxe Salon

By Jill Comoletti

While growing up in Liverpool, New York, Jillain Salomone used to paint the hair of her Barbie dolls with clear nail polish, pretending it was hair gel. She chopped the hair off all her porcelain dolls. By the end of her childhood, she'd attacked the hair of every doll she owned in some way, shape, or form. These were the very early beginnings of her career as a professional hair stylist.

B.

The finished salon feels modern, with chunky black furnishings and white walls. Hanging along these walls are large photographs of models styled by Salomone. Some of Salomone's friends are photographers, and they take pictures of the models—that way, her and her friends can build their portfolios. "We just kind of do it for fun, and we find wannabe models who want to build their portfolios, as well," she says.

Salomone points to one photograph in particular, where the model's pale white face is tilted up. Clouds of black eye shadow surround her eyes, salmon pink blush dots her cheeks, and her brown hair frames her face in tight ringlets. Salomone styled this model's hair and makeup, and it is her favorite photograph.



Screenshot of the ThunderCakes profile:

A.



Madame Fudge

Courtnee Futch of ThunderCakes

By Jill Comoletti

Photos courtesy of Courtnee Futch

Courtnee Futch led her customer into her dimly lit apartment, past the kitchen littered with slightly burnt baking sheets and mixing bowls smeared with gooey remnants of dough. Recently delivered boxes containing baking equipment took up most of her living room. She stopped in front of five stacked black boxes on her coffee table, and opened one of them. This box contained s'mores brownies ("still hot!"); the second held cookie s'mores. When she opened the third box—bacon cinnamon rolls—she demanded that her customer, Peter Rosado, smell the treats. "I just want to put my face in it!" Rosado hollered. Futch smiled and shook her head, her jet-black ponytail swinging playfully. A lemon-colored bandana pushed her hair off her face, exposing her arched eyebrows and fudge-colored eyes. She wore a baggy blue Syracuse sweatshirt and light-wash jeans. Her skin still shimmered from the rain she encountered on a dessert delivery a few minutes earlier.

Futch, a communication and rhetorical studies major at Syracuse University, started her bakery, ThunderCakes by Courtnee, in her dorm room during freshman year. Now it is her senior year, and she's filling up to 80 dessert orders per week. Futch hopes to open a storefront