

Customer is king ? or queen ? for Business Woman of the Year



By Brock Weir

It's been quite a ride since Pam Martin first walked into Creative Colours, going in for a fitting after agreeing to be in a fashion show for one of her favourite clothing boutiques.

After walking into the south Aurora shop, she got to chatting with the owner who said she was looking for part-time staff.

A part-time job was perfect for Ms. Martin who, at that time, was raising children ages seven and 10.

Now, they are 38 and 35, Ms. Martin has been at the helm of Creative Colours for over 20 years and now she is York Region's Business Woman of the Year.

Ms. Martin received the honour this month from the Business Woman's Network of York Region, picking up additional awards for Best Small Business and Best Customer Service.

'I knew I had been nominated for the Small Business Owner and Customer Service awards, but it didn't even enter my mind that that would be happening,' says Ms. Martin. 'When they were starting to talk about this person, there were little things I recognized and I thought, 'Oh my gosh! That's me!' When they called my name, I was totally shocked. It was an amazing award to win amongst a room of outstanding business women in York Region, so I was very, very honoured.

'It means a lot. This is my 20th year owning this business and in a business of your own you work really, really hard. There are ups and downs over the years, and just to be acknowledged by women that are in similar situations to me, owning their own businesses really meant a lot because I admire them so much.'

As a teen, Ms. Martin says she loved clothing and taking modelling courses in her youth, but working with Laura, her predecessor and buying items for the store along with her, stoked that creative fashion fire. It is an interesting process, she says, going through everything from start to finish all the while thinking of customers.

As she looks through clothing to stock for the store, she often thinks of each regular customer and what they will like. When those items arrive, she hits the computer sending out word that she has just the right thing for them. As a customer herself, she knows the importance of her customers and that, she says, is her key to success.

'I think now the business is way more customer-oriented than it was back then,' she says. 'It's a sign of the times, too. You can't just

put a sign on your door and expect people to come in. You have to be out there, thinking of your customers and being in touch with them all the time. Obviously, you have to have a good product. I target women who are 40-ish, and I have customers who are 80-ish too, but I don't target that young market. That is what the mall is filled with. You find your niche and you address that, and that is what I do. It is a matter of keeping in touch with offering a good shopping experience when they come through the door and that is what it is really about. If you don't do that, you're not going to be around.?

And that is evidently a winning formula. In an area of Town where businesses have come and are all-too-frequently gone, Creative Colours remains. In addition to customer service, Ms. Martin says she and her two staff members, 'my girls' simply have a passion for the business.

'Some people have a little job and they go and put their time into it, but I would say my girls are passionate about what they do here,' she says. 'There aren't a lot of places where you can go shopping, come through the door and say, 'Hi, Susie! How are you? How are the kids?' I have customers who have been shopping here for over 20 years and I have been on their life's journey with them. I was even invited to one of their big birthday parties. It is taking that few minutes extra to actually talk to people and get to know them.'

This recognition from the Business Women's Network of York Region makes her feel she and her team 'are doing something right' but as for whether the win has given her any ideas to step up her game, she says there still needs to be a bit of time for the shock to wear off.

But, continuing to grow the business is something currently on her mind 'including an expansion of the way they keep in touch ' and in tune ' with their customers electronically.