

Have your cake and eat it too...

...that's exactly what Sheila Norton is doing. Norton started her business, Sheila's Cakes, 10 years ago from her kitchen. It started out innocently enough. The treats she was sending to her daughter's class were a huge hit and her daughter's classmates' mothers started to call and place orders. Business was so brisk, that Norton began wondering if she should hang out her shingle. The question she kept asking herself was "Will people really buy what I make?"

Sheila did what she recommends to anyone thinking about going into business; she got a job in the industry she intended to enter as an entrepreneur. For several months, she decorated cakes for a bakery chain. Within six months, she was promoted to assistant bakery manager. The company expected management to work at least 60 hours a week. Sheila decided if she was going to work those kind of hours, it would be in her own business.

She took the plunge in November 2000, and the rest is history. Today, Sheila has 20 employees and crews work around the clock.



Sheila Norton

Sheila believes that assembling a great team is the most challenging aspect of being a business owner. She finds that her current employees are the best source of referrals and she brings interns in from the local community college and technical school. Interns are wonderful, according to Sheila, because they already have knowledge of health department issues.



Customers contemplate their decisions.

Sheila doesn't ask her employees to do anything she hasn't done and still does. She expects her employees to put forth their best effort and says she finds that people will work to fulfill expectations.

Family support is paramount according to Sheila. Husband, Greg, who is a pediatric oncology nurse, and daughter, Sarah, a high school senior work with Sheila in the business doing whatever needs to be done. Sheila credits her daughter with the outstanding organization that is apparent when you visit Sheila's Cakes. Everything is spotless and in its place. Sheila's mother, father and two sisters also pitch in, making the business a family interest.

"Do your homework, if you want to go into business," says Sheila. She studied her competitors and bought their products. Visiting her business plan from a competitive perspective was invaluable, according to Sheila. She knew exactly what she needed to do to make consumers pass by other bakeries on their way to her shop. She continuously monitors her competition, reads magazines to determine latest trends, watches the "Food Network," and is active in the Southeast and Southwest Retail Bakers Associations and the Retail Bakers of America to make certain that she stays on top of the industry.

Restaurant clients are attractive due to the consistency of receivables they provide, and a strength of Sheila's Cakes is the ability to provide exactly what is needed to a long list of these clients. The only downside for restaurant clients is that Sheila's Cakes' desserts are so tempting, patrons may want to skip the main course and go right to dessert.



Sheila gives the same extraordinary attention to customers wanting a unique cake for a special occasion as she does her restaurant clientele. Looking through several albums of custom cakes, you quickly learn that the sky's the limit. "Bring us a picture and we'll replicate it in cake," says Sheila. You'll find golf courses, poker tables, flowers, etc. all done in cake. The art is amazing.

Brides have a special place at Sheila's Cakes and they can select a cake from a catalog or bring a picture of their dream cake for Sheila to produce. A ladder was required to put the top on a wedding cake Sheila recently created.

Walk-ins are welcome and Sheila's Cakes' cases are full of treats to delight the taste buds.



Sheila's Cakes has enjoyed great success, in fact, a recent challenge was a 45-minute wait to get in the door at Sheila's Cakes when customers came by to pick up Christmas desserts. While this falls into the great problem to have category, all her success required Sheila to ponder the question of whether to grow the business or choose status quo. Her decision to grow required more space. She bought a new building with room for expansion, eliminating the long lines. Essential Capital and Sheila's bank partnered to finance the real estate and Sheila's Cakes is moving forward.

Sheila epitomizes the successful entrepreneur, nothing less than 110% will do. Ask Sheila if she can do something and she'll say yes, then she'll figure out how to get it done. She certainly has mastered all the challenges of owning a business, even delegating, which isn't easy for a *Type A* personality. According to Sheila, everything is working out just fine. She gets to make a living doing what she loves. It's like eating your cake and having it too. Sheila is thrilled with where she is today, and looks forward to future growth.

Essential Capital is proud to work with entrepreneurs like Sheila Norton, who provide jobs and a service to the community. Our sincere congratulations to Sheila on her success.

Learn more about Sheila's cakes at www.sheilacakes.com



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