

Women of Distinction



Marjorie Corrow

equipment and fixtures I'd need to sell both outside and inside at craft shows, almost every weekend of the year," says Corrow, who eased out of her full-time embroidery job, took out an equity loan, remodeled a room in her home and set up shop with a single-head machine.

As her customer base and order volume grew, so did the company. She bought two more single-head machines and hired three employees. She felt that she maxed out her earning potential with children's bibs and apparel, as there was a limit as to what people would pay for an item; her business was bringing in about \$75,000 at that time. After some success at a few Irish-themed events (and with no knowledge of Irish culture), Corrow decided to start selling Irish-themed apparel. "It took some getting used to when I went from the Bib Lady to the Irish Lady," she says.

For the last four years, Corrow has edged out of craft shows and toward Irish, Scottish and Celtic festivals. "These festivals are well-attended, but have lower vendor-to-attendee ratios, and higher sales for me," says Corrow, who made her wares stand out by creating beautiful women's apparel, including Irish green-plaid pants with a matching green plaid appliqué hoodie. She sold 70 pairs of pants the first weekend.

Corrow knew she had hit it big the first time she earned more than \$10,000 in one weekend. "I knew I was onto something," she says. She was also accepted to the Dublin Irish Festival, one of the country's largest Irish festivals. In her first year at the festival, she grossed \$18,500 in two days.

Then, Corrow opened her first mall kiosk, which grossed over \$300,000 last year. Now, she has two kiosks operating in two states. She aims to expand her wholesale line into Irish-themed stores and to have a few year-round Shamrock Chic locations, her retail division. "I've become an expert at building what are known as 'pop-up' stores, some in malls, and some at festivals," she says. "The display attracts customers, and the designs and clothing assortment keep them coming back."

THE OVERNIGHT EXPERT

When she entered the decorated-apparel industry 22 years ago, Anna Johnson didn't expect to be considered an instant expert. But a week or two into the world of embroidery and screen printing, Johnson was fielding questions about logos and products. "Six months before, I was serving hamburgers," says Johnson, owner of Phoenix-based Super Embroidery and Screenprinting ([asi/339634](tel:480339634)). "Now, I was the expert. My husband told me that I just had to be that person."

Luckily, Johnson had a background in business and bookkeeping. She had managed restaurants and also owned a gift shop, but "the best experience I got was from being a waitress and a manager," she says. "You learn to check your numbers and your costs, and to manage people."

In 1988, Johnson had come to Phoenix to be a commercial pilot. Upon meeting her husband, and realizing that the airline jobs were based on the East Coast, she decided to switch careers when she met with a friend who needed embroidery and

screen-printing work. Virtually overnight, Johnson got a loan and purchased two machines.

Today, her multi-million-dollar contract decorating shop employs 35 people, including bookkeepers, accountants, decorators, digitizers and artists. The company prints logos and designs and embroiders shirts, hats and jackets; the shop also offers direct-to-garment printing, vinyl cutting and heat pressing. "We'll do from one up



Anna Johnson

to 50,000 pieces," Johnson says. Many of the shop's orders are for events, tournaments, charity runs and uniform programs. Johnson likes to stay in the forefront; every morning, she takes a walk through the shop to see what's running that day.

Johnson definitely faces challenges as a business owner. "We need to find a way to overcome competition from overseas digitizing and orders," she says. "There has to be a way to do that business here again, even if costs a little bit more." She sees her business growing more nationally in the future. For the industry as a whole, she sees technology as the way of the future. Johnson believes that the ones ahead in technology will survive and fare the best. "The pricing structures will never be like they were in the '90s," she says. "The profit margins will be tighter. We have to be more efficient to compete." ■

JENNIFER VISHNEVSKY is a staff writer for *Stitches*. Contact: jvishnevsky@asicentral.com.

Fun Fact
Marjorie Corrow grossed \$18,500 in one weekend selling Irish-themed apparel at a festival.