

Nothing Occasional about Occasionally's Success

Story by Libby Carty McNamee

Photo by Melissa Christenson

Only occasionally do you run across a woman strong enough to risk it all to pursue her passion. Tracee Martin, owner of Occasionally in Carytown, is one of those inspiring women.

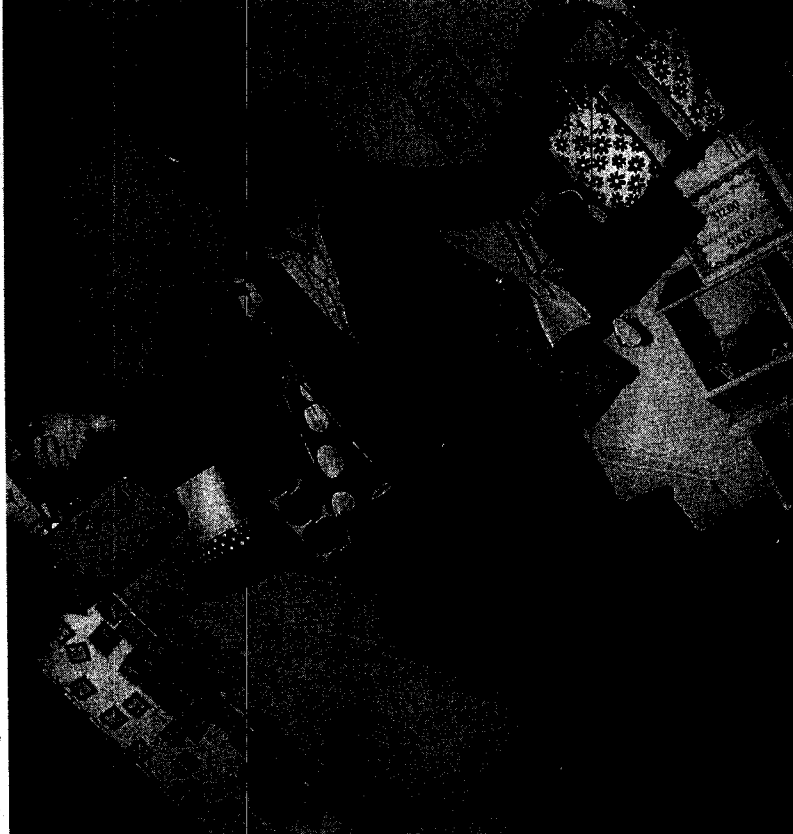
Daring to leave the security of a plush corporate job, Tracee decided to become her own boss and start her own business. When her research revealed that the trendy neighborhood did not have a handbag shop, she developed a business plan to create one. In December 2003, Tracee opened a boutique filled with adorable purses, diaper and tote bags, luggage, accessories, apparel, gifts, stationery, and bath and body products. She now admits with a laugh, "I was scared to death. Being a single mom, I am my family's only source of income, and I had worked so hard to achieve a certain status in my career."

Despite the challenges posed by venturing out on her own, she says she "would do it all over again"—especially since the business has already exceeded her original projections. Making the most of her master's degree from the University of Virginia, she has developed creative ways to further expand her burgeoning business. Noticing a lack of purses and "girly gifts" for sale online, Tracee seized the opportunity. Online sales currently account for a significant percentage of her overall sales, keeping her full-time retail manager quite busy.

Not one to sit back complacently, Tracee decided to experiment with home-based "purse parties." These also have been a resounding success, allowing women to embrace their "girly girl" side, have fun, and earn extra cash. The demand has been so strong that she recently hired a full-time employee to manage operations for her 24 consultants spanning 15 states and two countries. "People are thrilled to get an invitation," Tracee says enthusiastically. "I encourage parties in the fall for winter purses and then again in the spring for a summer look. It's great! We welcome new consultants almost every week."

The acronym PINK is Tracee's mantra. "Pink isn't just a color," she explains. "It's an attitude. P stands for Perseverance. I is for Innovation. N is finding your Niche, and K is Kindness." Tracee's "PINK," combined with her friendly can-do attitude and savvy business sense, have made her a frequent speaker at ladies' conferences around town.

Tracee advises prospective entrepreneurs, "Do your homework. Take the time to develop a business plan, and think it through without copying another store. It's got to be your passion. I wanted to be my own boss and have the freedom to do my own



thing, but this is not for everyone. It's not about the money; you have to enjoy what you are doing."

Visit www.OccasionallyHandbags.com or, better yet, drop by this chic Carytown boutique at 3407 West Cary Street. I can promise you won't emerge empty-handed. I didn't. Now I am just hoping for a purse party invitation.... **V**

Libby Carty McNamee is a local freelance writer who also has a penchant for purses.

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