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Stay-at-home moms succeed on the side

By Jenny Callison
Enquirer contributor

Last May, Westwood resident Treva Lambing felt the need to retire from her job as buyer for the Taft Museum's gift shop to stay at home with her son, 11, and daughter, 7.

"Most people end up going back to work when their kids go to school; I was the opposite," she said.

Lambing, 44, wanted to take advantage of her background in fashion design, a flair for sewing, and 21 years' experience in retail. In February, she launched a home-based business, In The Bag, selling a line of custom handbags made from vintage clothing and heirloom or distinctive fabrics. The bags sell for \$45 to \$65.

"So far, I have had some great success with my purses," she said. "I can't say that they are flying off the shelf yet, but I am developing a following."

Lambing creates the handbags and markets them as well.

So far she sells through her Web site, <http://home.fuse.net/inthebag/>, and at two retail locations: A Show of Hands in Kenwood Towne Centre and S. Stewart Ltd. in Wyoming.

"It's not a bad way to start," she said. "I'm targeting more stores, but I'm only one person, and I have to do everything."

Though Lambing works from home, her schedule is flexible enough to permit her a more active role in her children's activities. Like many mothers, her life is centered around her children, and so it's not surprising that for her and other mothers, their children serve as motivation - or inspiration - to start their own businesses.

Sandra Vogel, managing director of the Cincinnati chapter of eWomen's Network, a national women's business networking organization, says many women start home-based jobs as a transition between careers and children.

"So they find something that fits in with their current lifestyle and interests," says Vogel. "It can be very fulfilling for them."

Vogel has a "virtual" assistant, a woman who works from her home, scheduling her work time around her young children's naps and bedtimes. "The job gives her the ability to be with her little ones. She does a fantastic job because she's very focused when she is working."

These at-home situations, she says, "bridge a gap. The women can be very self-directed and self-managing. They have so much creative energy and expertise. With the right contacts and connections, they can do very, very well."

Providing hair care

One woman who is seeing strong success working from home is Tawana Smith



"Give A Doggy A Bone" is the name Melissa Gruenhagen of Hamilton gave her home-based business. She lets her son and daughter help her roll and cut dough for dog treats. Photos by Meggan Booker/The Enquirer

[Zoom](#)

NATIONAL EXPOSURE

Tawana and Brian Smith's company, Treasured Locks, is profiled in the May issue of Ebony magazine. In October, the publication announced its plans to feature unusual home-based businesses and asked for reader suggestions.

The Smiths sent information to Ebony and were thrilled to learn that Treasured Locks was selected for the feature.

"We felt like our business was unique, and we were excited to learn that the magazine thought so, too," Tawana Smith said.

The exposure has already paid off in a 25 percent spike in orders, Brian Smith said.

Jenny Callison

CALLING MOMS

Want to know more about one of the businesses profiled in this

story?

One woman who is seeing strong success working from home is Tawana Smith.

When she failed to find natural, good-quality ethnic hair care products for her daughters, Smith, 41, of West Chester Township, started her own Internet-based business in May 2002.

"We would go to local stores looking for hair care products, with little success," she recalled. "Out of frustration, my husband, Brian, turned to the Internet."

After finding some products they liked, the couple decided to start a home-based Internet company that would offer those and other specialized African-American hair-care supplies. Their venture, Treasured Locks, soon began fielding requests from Asian and bi-racial women who wanted to find products created for their hair, too. Once the company established itself, it began expanding into bath and spa specialties, which opened an even larger target market.

To expand its visibility locally, Treasured Locks now has a retail location at the Red Door in Mason.

"The Internet store is low risk for us and gives us access to a national market," said Brian Smith, who works for a software company and has used his sales and marketing expertise to spur the company's growth.

The business has grown from Tawana's sideline activity into a major source of family income.

Tawana Smith home-schools the couple's two daughters, who are 5 and 8. By developing Treasured Locks' Web site, www.treasuredlocks.com, as the company's primary information and ordering mechanism, the Smiths manage to keep the business from taking over their lives. They have a separate business line and don't answer it except during business hours.

"I have dedicated time for me to be with the girls," she said.

Treats for dogs

Keeping personal life and work separate is more difficult for Melissa Gruenhagen, 43, of Hamilton, who - like Lambing - both produces and markets her merchandise.

The single mother of two has developed a line of distinctive dog treats, which she makes from scratch. Sometimes her daughter, 12, and son, 7, help her roll and cut out the seemingly endless batches of dough.

"It's so satisfying to make your own money; very different from working for somebody else," said the former librarian and teacher. "The checks coming in result from your ingenuity, creativity and product you made all on your own."

Then there is the satisfaction of seeing her children off on the bus every morning and being home to greet them in the afternoon. She enjoys the people and the pets she has met in marketing her business, Give A Doggy A Bone.

Even though she admits she works "an incredible amount of hours," Gruenhagen in six months has replaced her former librarian's salary and is outgrowing her home work space.

Give A Doggy A Bone now boasts 22 flavors of dog treats and sells through 15 locations in Southwest Ohio and Southeast Indiana. Gruenhagen is in the midst of overhauling her Web site to better showcase her offerings and to spur sales.

Puppets for kids

In The Bag

Treva Lambing

(513) 662-6731

<http://home.fuse.net/inthebag/>

Treasured Locks

Tawana and Brian Smith

(513) 759-2206

www.treasuredlocks.com

Give A Doggy A Bone

Melissa Gruenhagen

(513) 887-0292

www.giveadoggyabone.com

Hushpuppets

Liz Gantzer

(513) 260-1133

www.hushpuppets.net

Beyond the Rainbow

Melissa Cirulli

(859) 426-0501



Tawana Smith runs Treasured Locks from home to spend more time with daughters Shayna, 5 (left) and Kayla, 8.

[Zoom](#)

Melissa Cirulli, Fort Mitchell: towels
Melissa Gruenhagen, Hamilton: Dog treats
Tawana Smith, West Chester: Hair care
Treva Lambing, Westwood: Handbags

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Liz Gantzer got the idea for Hushpuppets when her two teen-age boys were younger.

"My kids spent far too much time in front of the TV and playing video games," said Gantzer, of New Richmond. So she began making puppets to get the kids to interact with each other.

"The puppets force kids to use their imagination and give them a blank slate they can create from," she said.

Making the puppets was a hobby, but one that turned out to have strong demand. So Gantzer expanded the concept into a sideline business. She starts with purchased durable puppet bodies and adds custom clothing and accessories and embroidered names. Adults sometimes buy her puppets as gifts for other adults.

Gantzer sells Hushpuppets online and through craft shows as she has time, juggling her business with a full-time job and carpooling kids to sporting events.

Stepping back

Sometimes such cottage-industry businesses can go too well - the combined mommy pressures and work pressures force work-at-home moms to step back a bit. That was the case with Melissa Cirulli of Fort Mitchell.

Several years ago, Cirulli, 32, and a friend formed Beyond The Rainbow to market their handmade children's clothing. Cirulli was going through a divorce and needed additional income; her partner, Missy Jones, wanted a creative outlet when her two children were in school.

Their venture met with early success, so they expanded through the Web to a national market.

"We started getting calls from other time zones, so the phone was ringing at all hours," Cirulli said. "I was doing all the Web site management, and it was not a direction I was happy with, especially since I had to do all the Web site things at 11 at night or 6 in the morning. My daughter, who is 3, needed me more, too."

The two decided to take a breather. They disabled their Web site, and Cirulli stays comfortably busy filling orders for birth cloths, children's hooded towels and sports towels from her existing customer base.

"It was easier to run a business when my daughter was younger," she reflected.

"... I was feeling a certain amount of guilt. So I adjusted my work amount to fit what needs to be done."

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