



Julie Millen, Benjamin Twiggs

Sometimes when I wake up in the morning, I think, "What the heck did I do? In this economy, at my age, I purchased a retail business? I must be crazy!" As a former Computer Systems Engineer, mom and amateur graphic designer, retail sales was the last thing on my agenda.

My life has taken some unexpected turns during the last 5 years. The original plan involved travelling and relaxing, but circumstances dictated the opposite. I now needed a career; or more specifically, a new passion.

I busied myself with part time jobs and classes while I searched. In October of 2007, my friend, the owner of Benjamin Twiggs, hired me for seasonal work. I found myself in my first retail job ever. Temporarily, so I thought.

I wasn't expecting to be blown away by the experience. What loyal, interesting and eclectic customers! The cherry products... to die for. Who doesn't love to be surrounded by cherries in the Cherry Capital? Then to my delight one day the owner said she was going to sell the store. "I'm interested!" I said. And 9 months later, on August 28, 2008, it was mine.

I had found my passion! SCORE rubberstamped my business plan, my bank loan was approved, the lease was transferred and I was ready! I hired my good friend Maria Perez-Bastian, who brought retail experience and a drive for success.

Founded in 1966, Benjamin Twiggs is not just a store, it's a part of Traverse City's history. I am touched by how deeply meaningful it is to so many people. Previous owners have been in to introduce themselves. Employees from long ago visit and reminisce with us. Customers tell us about when it was in the Cherryland Mall, down the street near the old Osteopathic Hospital, in the little cherry hut. They remember visiting Traverse City as a

child and a stop at Benjamin Twiggs was always on the agenda. Everyone has a story, and each one is as interesting as the last. Benjamin Twiggs is embedded in their childhood memories.

I'm not looking to take over the cherry world, (ok, sometimes I am) but I do want to reclaim that piece of the pie that Benjamin Twiggs once held so that today's generation will have stories to tell their families about their visits to Traverse City and Benjamin Twiggs.

I believe that in some way everything I've done in my lifetime has prepared me for owning this business; from the seemingly meaningless part-time jobs to my experiences raising my kids to my career when I was in my twenties. My advice? Keep your eyes open. Find something you are excited about. And dive right in. I did, and although I may feel crazy sometimes, this is the most fun I've had in years.