

Creations Unlimited Unique Boutique

Success Story Written by Angela Clements Cattell

Lissa Marie Krueger has always enjoyed being creative. Although she is a self-taught designer of jewelry, hats and clothing, Lissa was also somewhat inspired by the creative abilities of her Mother and Grandmother who were very skilled seamstresses as well. Miss Krueger worked for 5 years creating and sewing costumes for the Willoughby Eastlake School system and another 15 years designing and sewing high fashion clothing and accessories for her own business, Creations Unlimited. She sold hats and jewelry that she designed at various craft shows while she worked from her home designing and altering clothing for her many customers.

About 10 years ago, Lissa started buying dresses and hats from a friend whose boutique had just closed. With an entrepreneurial mindset, she began preparing inventory for a shop of her own that she hoped to have someday. By August of 2014, she made the plunge and opened her own store front in downtown Willoughby, Ohio selling formal wear, bridal gowns, handmade accessories and even consignment vintage furniture pieces while providing services such as creating one of a kind designs, dress alterations and dress preservation. Miss Krueger's dream of becoming a successful small business shop owner was soon becoming a reality.



Lissa Marie Krueger is shown here sitting on one of several vintage furniture pieces in her shop. Behind her is just a sampling of the many beautiful dresses on which she has worked.

However, once Miss Krueger opened, she felt overwhelmed by the many challenges a business owner must face. She needed advice. After being referred by a fellow shop owner, she met with some members of SCORE who then introduced her to Jim Gray from the Lake/Geauga Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Mr. Gray encouraged her to attend the On BASE Start-Up Business Training Seminar that he instructs for the Lake/Geauga SBDC and so she did.

She then scheduled a counseling session and met with Jim Gray a few days later for more specific guidance. They first discussed the transition and the challenges of going from a home based business to a brick and mortar shop. Lissa had questions on structuring the business, accounting, taxes and marketing. Mr. Gray recommended she form a separate entity as soon as she could and explained the advantages. To help her improve marketing the business, he urged her to attend networking events, join her local Chamber of Commerce and have an official grand opening. They discussed other cost effective marketing ideas as well. Mr. Gray also referred Lissa to other free or low cost business resources and referrals to help with her accounting and taxes.

Mr. Gray would stop in at the boutique at various times including her grand opening to check on Miss Krueger's progress and to answer any business questions she might have. "I could call Jim for anything", Miss Krueger explained. By the end of 2015 Miss Krueger's revenues were steadily increasing. However, she soon realized she still needed help as her expenses became higher than estimated. Jim and Miss Krueger met again in early 2016 to discuss possible solutions to increase her cash flow while also exploring micro loan programs available in the area to help offset some costs. Mr. Gray recommended contacting ECDI (Economic Community Development Institute) in Cleveland for a possible loan or line of credit. "Jim spent hours with me working on paperwork required to obtain the micro loan. He walked me through the entire application."

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After many weeks of waiting, Miss Krueger's micro loan was finally approved. She was able to remodel her shop while adding some new sewing machines. She now employs two customer service clerks, a manager and a seamstress. She has also expanded into a second business creating a new clothing line along with partner Cybele Palulowski called Magnolia and Lace Designs. Miss Krueger and her partner's clothing line were featured on WKYC's Live on Lakeside in May of 2016 to show off a few of their vintage wedding dress designs that were shown at Black-Tie Reception & Designer Runway Shows which is a part of Cleveland Fashion Week. "Now one business has turned into two," exclaims Miss Krueger.

When asked what advice she would give other aspiring entrepreneurs, Miss Krueger emphasizes, "stay organized. Keep your inventory as controlled as possible otherwise your day can become difficult."

She also pointed out the importance of customer service. Miss Krueger takes the time to meet with each bride personally and listens closely to their requests understanding the importance of her customer's special day. There is no doubt that Miss Krueger's customers absolutely love working with her. You can find testimonials and excellent reviews all over the internet praising Lissa Marie Krueger's beautiful shop and outstanding service. One customer even made a special photo album as a thank you to Miss Krueger that featured all of Miss Krueger's amazing bridal party dress creations for that particular wedding. Great customer service translates to "repeat business and increased sales", explains Miss Krueger.

In addition Miss Krueger impressed upon the importance of using all the free or low cost business resources available. "I learned a lot from Jim (Gray). Besides his assistance he gave me a huge list of referrals."

Miss Krueger's success story continues to be recognized and has been nominated in several best of categories. Most recently, Creations Unlimited was chosen by Cleveland's Hot List 2016 as one of the top 5 best places to find wedding dresses. According to Miss Krueger, "I would not be where I'm at today without Jim's advice. Thanks to Jim Gray from the SBDC I can stay afloat as long as there are brides in the world."



A photo of Creations Unlimited Store Front. To find out more about Lissa Marie Krueger's shop, go to <http://www.leheirloomboutique.com/> or <https://www.facebook.com/HeirloomBoutique> . To check out Miss Krueger's and Miss Pawlowski's new clothing line, go to <http://www.magnolialacedesigns.com/about-me.html>