

Knack for knickknacks pays off for FW businesswoman

Betty Dillard - August 13, 2007



Teresa Nelson has bagged another hit for both her award-winning gift and gourmet food company and the city of Fort Worth.

Within minutes of Nelson's recent unveiling of an exclusive line of Cowtown-themed gift baskets and amenities, orders started pouring into the CEO's Everman-based business, Teresa's Treasures.

"I was shocked," she says. "I hope this means that people will embrace this new product line because I want the city to benefit from it. Fort Worth is my home and focus. I want to give back something."

Like her other customized themed-gift baskets – she offers almost 2,000 products, many exclusive, from more than 700 vendors nationwide – Nelson's newest venture highlights dozens of specialty food and gift items, this time from local businesses, including Joe T. Garcia's, Mrs. Renfro's, Mrs. Baird's Bread and the Vending Nut Co. The \$1 to \$100 priced items are distinctively wrapped in "Western chic" designs, as Nelson calls them, which encompass many of the area's favorite historical and cultural attractions. She hopes the ever-changing range of products will promote local economic development while appealing to corporations, hotels and conventions, as well as individuals.

"After months of research, we found a need for city-themed designs," she says. "Our goal is to feature our city and all the best it has to offer."

Nelson, and her seven-person staff that includes husband Dennis Nelson and parents Howard and Betty Walley, spent almost two years developing the Fort Worth-themed products. It took six months to receive contractual permission from city leaders to stamp each product with the official Cowtown logo. Fort Worth is the only city in the nation to have such a structured gift program, Nelson says.

Mayor Mike Moncrief couldn't be happier with Nelson's new city-based products, which he hailed as a complement to Fort Worth's "cowboys, cowgirls, community and culture."

"Teresa's gift amenities and goodies will leave our guests with fond memories of their stay. They will promote the businesses that have made this city great," said Moncrief. "And they will entice people back for more. This is a remarkable opportunity to promote our city and build on an already strong tourism market."

"Teresa cares deeply for this city, her customers and all who call Fort Worth home," he added. "She appreciates what this city has meant to her, and in turn she's doing her part to wave our flag."

After helping a friend market and sell more than 2,000 gift baskets in 1999, Nelson, 36, launched her own home-based business the next year. She projects 25 to 30 percent growth this year and, if the Fort Worth campaign takes off, she foresees 70 percent growth in 2008.

Not bad for someone who “can’t draw a straight line with a ruler,” she laughs. And for someone who had no interest in starting a gift basket business.

“I’m not the poster child for business plans and research,” she admits. “I just fell into this. But I listen to customers and have learned what they want and I try to give them that.”

Nelson has numerous awards to her credit. A 1993 graduate of Texas Wesleyan University with a degree in finance and economics, she attributes her success to teamwork, commitment to detail, quality of products and loyal customers, which now number 7,000.

Her greatest accomplishment, however, is surviving a devastating car wreck and a brain tumor in 1992, both of which forced her to learn how to walk, talk and eat again.

“My whole life turned around after the accident. I was driven for money and power but everything changed,” she says. “Now I have a whole different perspective. I’m grateful to be alive and able to help others. If we make something that makes someone’s day, that’s what we’re here for. I just want to make a difference in someone’s life.”

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