

2004 Woman of Distinction Article

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Heidi Bowen is an independent business woman who owns and operates two beading stores in two Montana cities and has 6 employees on her payroll-an impressive resume for a 24-year-old woman.

What's more impressive is that Bowen started her business, the Garden of Beadin', when she was fresh out of high school at the age of 17, and has achieved this level of success in just seven years,

"I just really fell into beading and just loved it" said Bowen. At the time she opened her store, Butte already had a bead shop. Bowen said she wasn't satisfied with the inventory, and one day the thought occurred to her to open her own shop.

With her own savings from summer jobs and some financial assistance from her parents, Bowen set her dream in motion.

"I only started with \$5,000" said Bowen. With that initial investment, she rented a shop in Uptown Butte, made her own sign, bought some inventory, put an ad in the newspaper and opened up shop. Business has been good ever since.

Bowen said her biggest challenge getting started was other people's attitudes toward her business plans. "I think I had a big problem with being taken seriously. People laughed at me," she recalled. "After about three years of being in business people finally started to realize it was a real business," she said.

One advantage she had at the time she opened the business was that she was living with her parents. She was able to simultaneously run the shop and take classes at Montana Tech in Business Information Technology.

"I got a really firm basis in accounting and business management. That really helped with the business aspect of it," she said. "I went for two semesters, but then the store got so busy I had to quit school," she added.

Bowen said that for the first few years she primarily reinvested her profits into the business. "At the same time I made my own beaded jewelry and sold it at art fairs. It really helped supplement the business. I was able to generate a lot of income that way," she said.

But success has its price. "Now the store's so busy, I'm not able to bead any more. It's kind of ironic," she said

In fact, business is so good that Bowen recently opened her second store in Bozeman on North 19th Ave. in the Bridger Peaks Town Center.

When asked why she thought she has achieved such success at such a young age, Bowen replied, "The reason I think I've become so successful is that I have a good knowledge of beading, a strong business sense, and I really enjoy merchandising," she said.

Bowen said people often approach her to ask her advice for starting their own businesses. "I tell them as long as it's something you really enjoy and don't mind working 80 hours a week to make a go of it, you can become successful at it," she said.

Bowen has learned how to successfully juggle marriage, motherhood, and a career. She married Matt Bowen four years ago and she admits that she is already teaching their three-year-old son, Sean, to bead.

Bowen is still amazed at how her simple idea has grown into the business it is today. "I never thought it would become this huge and this successful. It became more than I could ever imagine which is totally awesome. It's really been a lot of fun," she said.