

THE NEW ENTREPRENEURS



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Teresa Stoughton Marafino (left) and Pauline Gordon are among the growing number of women who are becoming business owners. Marafino, with her sister, Mary Louise Stoughton, run Green Gables Restaurant in Jennerstown. Gordon has owned her own funeral home for 51 years.

Women making an impact

By DEBRA S. MOFFITT
THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Teresa Stoughton Marafino folded napkins at the Green Gables Restaurant at age 3. Now, at 32, she runs the show.

She is one of more than 4,000 women business owners in Cambria and Somerset counties - a statistic that's on the rise.

The ranks of women business owners like Marafino have increased locally in recent years, said Bob Layo, Greater Johnstown-Cambria County Chamber of Commerce president. Economic census statistics back that up.

Cambria County had 2,455 women-owned businesses in 1992, up from 1,844 in 1987. Somerset also saw one-third more women open their own businesses. Numbers there grew from 1,145 to 1,532.

Area counties mirror a statewide trend almost to the percentage point. Pennsylvania's women-owned businesses increased to 227,500 in 1992, a 36-percent jump.

Marafino and her sister, Mary Louise Stoughton, own the 70-year-old Jennerstown restaurant and the adjacent Mountain Playhouse, a professional summer stock company. Stoughton, who lives in Pasadena, Calif., stays involved through faxes, e-mail and frequent telephone calls. Marafino is the head of day-to-day operations.

Some days, that takes in a lot of ground.

The restaurant, both rustic and elegant, caters to walk-in patrons, weddings and other large groups. It seats as many as 500 in its woody interior, where diners have a view of a waterfall and Stoughton Lake.

The 444-seat Mountain Playhouse, established in 1939, produces nine shows a season. That keeps Marafino up late from May to October and sends her to New York City for auditions during the winter months, when both the restaurant and theater are closed.

She's never far from work because she and her family live above the restaurant. Marafino and her husband, Matthew, have a 5-year-old son, James, and an 8-year-old daughter, Elizabeth.

State statistics show a jump in females running businesses

Marafino works long, odd hours, but says she enjoys it.

"It isn't stagnant in any way. Things are constantly evolving. The shows are changing," she said in an interview at the restaurant.

Marafino is one of the area's many success stories with a financial angle.

Pauline Gordon has owned her business for 51 years. She opened a Johnstown funeral home Dec. 14, 1946, and has yet to retire. Gordon, 79, urges women opening their own businesses to avoid borrowing money to do so.

"The only advice I'd have is to make sure they're financially able to start on their own. That interest will eat you up," Gordon said in a telephone interview.

Diane Green opened her own business this month in Moxham.

Corner Variety, 222A Ohio St., offers everything from gifts to hardware to hosiery, Green said in a telephone interview.

She wants the store to meet a host of everyday needs. Getting it up and running was a challenge, but not an insurmountable one, Green said. She had to appear before the city's zoning board in order to locate her store in a building that was vacant for five years. And Green, 39, is still working with suppliers to fully stock the store.

"They've been learning experiences," she said. Marafino went through those growing pains years ago.

She says finding the right balance to maximize both the restaurant and the theater now is a central part of her job. She said the two work in tandem: The shows create business for the restaurant, and weddings at the restaurant help support the theater.

Recently, she and her sister decided to make the theater a nonprofit corporation - a status that will make it easier to get aid from foundations, Marafino said. The two also agreed to close the restaurant from January to April 13 because business was slow.

Yet as changes have occurred behind the scenes, the Green Gables Restaurant remains a fixture that hasn't changed much on the outside.

Marafino prides herself on that. Patrons who haven't visited for 20 years remark how the place looks just the same.

Marafino's father, the late James Stoughton, founded the restaurant with his sister, Louise Maust, in 1927. A farmer's son, he wanted to do something other than milk cows, Marafino said. His paintings and other artwork adorn the walls of the restaurant.

The restaurant started as a road-side stand serving chicken salad sandwiches and angel food cake. It soon expanded, adding dining rooms in 1928 and 1929. The Green Gables was a hangout for young people before the 1950s, when the restaurant got its liquor license, Marafino said.

Since then, the menu has changed to feature fine American cuisine.

This year's selections included the restaurant's specialty, roast turkey, along with seafood Barzac, ostrich pepper steak and Maryland-style crab cakes. Desserts are simple: Chocolate fudge, walnut pie, cheese-cake, apple pie and ice cream.

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But it was the theater that drew Marafino to return home after graduating from college in 1987. She earned her English degree from Georgetown University, where she immersed herself in the Mask and Bauble theater group.

After graduation, she came became the producer of the Mountain Playhouse. Her young age has caused more of a stir than her gender.

Marafino has encountered no problems or obstacles being a woman business owner, she said. Her mother, also named Teresa, could not have said the same. A Harvard-educated architect, her mother faced discrimination on the job in the 1950s, Marafino said.

As for Marafino, she sees herself running the restaurant and playhouse for a long time coming. Both establishments are as big as she and her sister want them to be. And she says she has no desire to conquer a bigger theater elsewhere. She's happy at home.

"I had no hesitation. This is really what I wanted to do," Marafino said.

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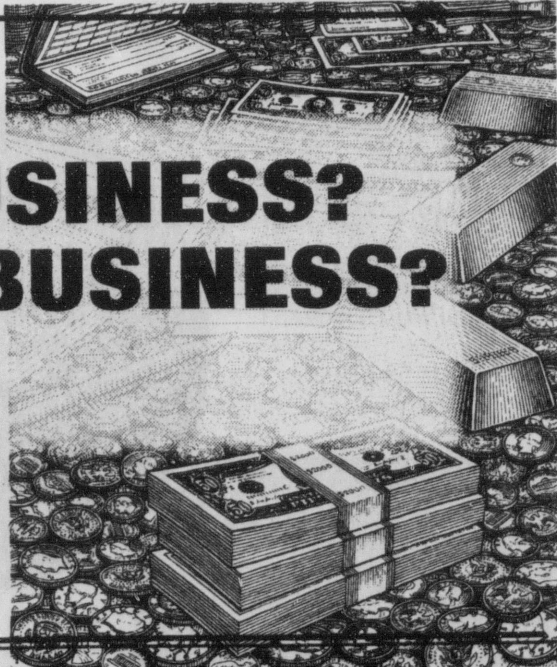
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