

Small San Jose business owner doesn't put all her eggs in one basket

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Juggling a full-time corporate job, managing a household and running a company that produces 10,000 gift baskets isn't easy. But for Debbie Quintana, owner, president and CEO of Gourmet Gifts, it's just an average day.

Recently named one of the "Top 40 Rising Stars under 40" by the San Jose Silicon Valley Business Journal, Quintana and her business are on the rise.

Quintana began her personalized gift basket company, Gourmet Gifts, in 2001. Years of making gift baskets for friends and family caused her to consider ordering supplies wholesale, a notion that blossomed into a full-fledged business.

"One of my big philosophies is that anytime anyone receives a gift that it be meaningful," said Quintana. "What I want is for you to get a gift basket that you look at and go, 'Oh my gosh, that's my favorite coffee,' or 'I love those crackers.'"

Inspired by her mother's recent recovery from breast cancer, Quintana began the "Spirit of Wellness Program," a line of gift baskets for people experiencing difficult times. She studied people

going through chemotherapy, heart disease, depression and other conditions to determine what types of foods and scents are comforting and designed baskets appropriate to their needs. Five percent of the proceeds from these baskets are given to relevant community organizations, such as the American Heart Association or the Susan G. Breast Cancer Komen Foundation.

Gourmet Gifts' management is modeled in the collaborative style that Quintana embraces in all her business endeavors. A full-time staff is led by operations manager Dawn Riley. She conducts the business while Quintana is at her day job as the global security manager for Cisco Systems.

"It is nice to have the balance that I go to Cisco and I'm a security person, and I'm very strict and structured," said Quintana. "Here I am able to relax and have some creativity."

When orders are too large for Gourmet Gift's small but efficient staff working out of Quintana's garage turned workshop, Kainos steps in to help. Kainos, a nonprofit organization based in Redwood City, employs adults with learning disabilities. When Kainos first approached Quintana about assembling baskets, she was hesitant, having originally assembled the baskets herself. "I think they do better than we do, because they are very detail oriented," she said. "It really benefits them because it gives them something to do and it allows us to fill larger orders."

Gourmet Gifts is green-certified in Santa Clara County. Within the last year, the business reduced paper use by 75 percent by utilizing the Internet. A conscious effort to reduce carbon emissions by purchasing from local California vendors and not using expedited mail contributes to the green effort.

Quintana places a heavy emphasis on networking

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and supporting other local businesses, particularly other women in business. She is an active member of both the San Jose and Sunnyvale Chambers of Commerce. In addition to her consulting for small businesses, Quintana founded the Women's Networking Alliance, a networking group of 24 female business owners.

Quintana is looking toward the future of Gourmet Gifts and is hoping to move into a full warehouse within the next two years.

"We want to become a household name not only here in San Jose but across the United States."

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