



Fifth Annual Women in Business

by Emily Russell, Michelle Billman & Richard Leder
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Our fifth annual Women in Business feature feels as special to us as any of its predecessors, and we know why. It's not the idea that women can be in business, or even that they can be successful in business; the fact that they have long been achieving greatness in the marketplace is common knowledge in this day and age. What makes this year's story special is the women we've found and featured. Each of them is smart, hardworking, serious, sincere and, yes, successful. Their differences are marked by their particular industry, but they share passion, professionalism and that certain sense of balance that points to a woman's touch.

Morrison Montgomery

Morrison Montgomery was born on Easter Sunday. Because of that, her predictable nickname became Bunny. She has four older sisters and they all said, "Look what the Easter Bunny brought home." Her family still calls her Bunny. But at Intracoastal Realty Corporation, they call her Chief Financial Officer.

"I have a CPA license, and I was employed by RSM McGladrey as a senior accountant. Jim Wallace (Intracoastal Realty owner) was one of my clients, and he contacted me about being his controller," Montgomery says. "As Intracoastal Realty has grown, I've grown with them. I was vice president of finance until April 2007, when I moved into the position of CFO."

She has a B.A. in science and business administration from Appalachian State University, an MBA through night classes, and a CPA through Northern Arizona University. "Achieving my CPA license was a difficult thing. I feel like becoming certified was one of my best accomplishments," says Montgomery.

Her father, one of the founding directors for Lowe's Home Improvements, was a strong influence on her choice of career. Montgomery explains that, "I would frequently go with him to work. I think that's where I got my desire to go into business. Somehow, I really just became attached to numbers. I find them comforting to work with. That's how I evolved in accounting."

What have been her observations about doing business on Wrightsville Beach? "The growth has been tremendous. Some of the changes really astound me, positive and negative," Montgomery says. "I'm not against growth, but I do want the community to keep its small-town feel."

Alyson Murphy

"I remember my mother taking us to the original Lumina," says Panachè Salon owner, manager and stylist Alyson Murphy. "I remember spending lots of time here as a child."

Born and reared in Burgaw, Murphy has a B.A. in business management from East Carolina University and cosmetology licenses in Wilmington and Los Angeles.

"I worked in a Wilmington salon for eight years, then I left for L.A. and joined the hair and makeup unit in the film industry for almost five years. I moved back to the beach with my 2-year-old daughter in 1998."

Three years ago this November, when Murphy found a space in The Landing in Wrightsville Beach, she knew what she had to do. "When I got the chance to open my own salon with this space, I decided to go for it. I wanted to be a mom and a stylist."

Now a happily married mother of two, she couldn't be more pleased with how it's all worked out. "The people here couldn't be nicer," Murphy says, "all the way down to the policemen who stopped in just to introduce themselves when I first opened up. It's very much a community here, and we've been very well greeted and accepted."

Where would she like her business to be five years from now? "I'd like to still be in my same location, with the same group of people working for me, and I'd like everyone to be even healthier and happier."

Chrissy Marsh

Chrissy Ogden Marsh wears two hats at work. She is the day-to-day manager for Bonair Daydreams, her greeting card company, now located in Wrightsville Beach, and also Bonair's award-winning artist.

Born in Pennsylvania, Marsh grew up near Pittsburgh first, and then in San Diego, California. She's a San Diego State grad who got her greeting card start on the West



Coast. "I started with a little pack of cards made from my photographs and quotes, and showed them to the L.A. Market. Their response was, 'I'll rep you.' That first year was amazing! I was freelancing and doing cards."

Balancing work and family is an ongoing challenge for Marsh, who says, "Finding time to create while raising kids is hard; after they come home at 2:30, it's family time."

Her proudest moment in business? "I'd have to say my first and latest Louie Awards. The first because it was only my second year in business — it was so exciting! I got to go to New York City and bring my mom and baby with me. This summer, I won my sixth Louie — it was exciting because I've survived so long in a fickle business."

Karen Manuel

It's no mistake that Karen Manuel, DVM, became a vet. "Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to be a veterinarian, so I went to college with that intent," Manuel says. She was born and reared in Winston Salem and attended North Carolina State University, where she earned a B.S. in zoology and her DVM.

She moved to Wrightsville Beach in May 2006 after 17 years in Richmond, Virginia. For 14 of those years, she owned and operated a veterinary house-call practice. "My accomplishments as a house-call veterinarian — to be able to do that practice and provide that service, to spend the most, and most important, time with the customer and their pet — are very proud for me," says Manuel.

Dr. Manuel is still building her business in Wrightsville Beach and hopes to one day be able to reside full time here on the Azalea Coast. Right now, she's still traveling back to Richmond twice a month.

She's traveling to other places, as well. "One thing my clients don't realize is how much I enjoy traveling. My best trip was to Belize last year with the Veterinary and Botanical Medical Association," Manuel says.

Who had the biggest influence on her decision to go into business? "I'd have to give that credit to my father," says Dr. Manuel. "He wasn't a veterinarian, but he always ran his own business in Winston Salem, so growing up, I could see that it can be done on your own."


Helen Rouse

"I'm proud to continue a tradition of trust and excellence that was handed down from my mother and my father and my aunt," says Helen Rouse, owner and operator of The Julia, a women's clothing boutique located in the Landfall Shopping Center. The business has been in the family since 1916, and Rouse got involved in 1977. "It was somewhat unintended," Rouse says. "I had graduated from college and come back home. I was helping my mother, and, as I got more involved, I realized how much I liked it."

She attended Peace College in Raleigh for two years, and then transferred to the University of Georgia, where she graduated with a B.A. in business.

Being able to consistently evolve and keep pace with the changes in the local and regional business community has been a steady challenge for Rouse, who says that in five years, she'd like to see The Julia "adapting and growing as it has in the past and being a leader in women's clothing in the area."

Have women achieved equality in the business world? "No, I wouldn't say total equality," Rouse says. "I think they've made great strides and gained respect, but not total equality. It will take longer for that mindset to change, but women who are out there working toward that equality have to keep plowing ahead until it is a fact."

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