

Mokena business a family affair

Children take parents' venture to next level

REBECCA SUSMARSKI, Assistant Editor

Kelli Bollman's return to the family business came by a stroke of fate.

In 1988, Bollman accepted an offer from her boss to become a full-time manager at the clothing store where she worked. Bollman always had a penchant for business; in grade school, she served as a bookkeeper for her parents' business, J&J's Creative Colors.

When the managerial position fell through, Bollman worried she might have to settle for keeping her part-time job at the store—until an unexpected incident brought her back to familiar territory.

"One of the ladies who worked for my mom was in a really bad accident," Bollman said in a phone interview. "I came to help my mom ... [and] at this point I'm thinking, 'I could make so much more money [here]. I have so much more opportunity to go with them.'"

Now, Bollman serves as president of J&J's Creative Colors. J&J's dyes and repairs vinyl seating, furniture, clothing and flooring for individuals and businesses such as car dealerships, restaurants and doctors' offices, among others. Bollman and her two older siblings, Terri Sniogolski and Gary Foster, obtained ownership of the company from their parents in 2008.

The trio also owns Creative Colors International, a partner company that sprouted from Sniogolski's idea to begin selling J&J's franchises. CCI now owns 36 franchises in the U.S. and Canada, as well as 86 company vehicles that travel to potential and existing clients.

Today's operation is much bigger than what Jim and



A mobile unit used by Creative Colors International, a partner company of J&J's that handles franchising.

JoAnn Foster originally formed in 1980 out of "desperation."

"My husband had lost his job as a plant manager, and I was at a trucking company," Foster said in a phone interview.

When she saw a newspaper ad for vinyl-dyeing classes in Minnesota, Foster decided to go with her husband on a weekend trip to the state to learn the skill.

"I'm the type of person who says 'let's do it,'" Foster said. "That Monday [when we came back], I gave notice I was quitting my job."

JoAnn began advertising her dyeing services to car dealerships but soon discovered dealerships mainly needed vinyl seats repaired. JoAnn learned to fix vinyl to expand her business and convinced Jim to quit his new but dissatisfying job to help. The couple ran J&J's out of a back room of their Tinley Park home until 2006, when they retired and their children relocated the business to an office in Mokena.

Bollman followed in her mother's driven footsteps when she took the reins at J&J's. She implemented changes in staff management and customer service to make the family business more efficient.

"We just became a little bit more involved," Bollman said. "[We started] watching numbers, and making sure our customers were being served on a regular basis."

Yet she insisted on main-

taining the family-centric philosophy that her parents applied to their relations with employees.

"My mom and dad worked for people their whole life, and they could never come to school functions or sporting activities," Bollman said. "They always believed when they hired people, they wanted them to have that freedom to come and go."

Under Bollman's oversight, J&J's gleaned a 17 percent increase in profits from 2008-2013. The company also earned recognition; in August 2012, J&J's received national certification as a Women's Business Enterprise from the Women's Business Development Center, a Chicago-based company dedicated to supporting businesses owned by women. The company acquired renewal of the certification in August 2013.

Receiving the award seemed to pay tribute to a line of female business owners that began with JoAnn 32 years before.

"My mother was always a proponent of women owning their own business," Bollman said. "She was very entrepreneurial ... [my dad] came up with a lot of the tools and stuff, but my mom came up more with the science and the chemistry."

The J&J's Creative Colors legacy has also left extensive room for men. Bollman's brother Gary has been with the team since 1996, while Bollman's husband Mark



Kelli Bollman, president of J&J's Creative Colors, works from the company's Mokena office. Bollman and her siblings obtained ownership of the company from their parents in 2008. PHOTOS BY REBECCA SUSMARSKI/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

serves as president of Creative Colors International. Sniogolski's husband Frank also works for CCI as an inventory manager.

"I think it's fantastic," Foster said, when asked how she felt about her children

running the business. "Kelli is more of a people person. She's just got so many skills that, of course, as a mother you never know exist until you get into business."

Bollman says she and her siblings have pondered

whether any of their children will make J&J's a third-generation enterprise.

"But we want them to see the world and experience life," Bollman said. "We don't want them to just come into the business."