

2021 SUCCESS STORY

SOUTHEAST REGION

NORTH DAKOTA
SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

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BRIDES BY JULIE

LISBON -- In 2015, Julie Ness got started in the bridal business when she saw an ad from a woman in Minot who was looking to get rid of her inventory quickly. The woman was a military spouse and her husband had been transferred to a new location. Julie made an offer, it was accepted, and she was on her way to pick up her first batch of inventory the next day.

At the time, Julie was working as a banker. Her plan at first was to market the dresses she just bought and create a little side business.

"I didn't really choose banking, it chose me just because of where I lived and that was the only thing available to me at the time. But in the back of my head I always knew I wanted to own my own business," says Julie.

When trying to figure out where to take her newfound side-business, Julie reached out to the ND SBDC for help. "I was pleasantly surprised at how much help I received at my first advising session. Normally I would

have expected to have to pay for the kind of service I received from the ND SBDC."

Thankfully, in addition to her banking experience, Julie brought experience in farming and a family owned hay grinding business. Therefore, she had a good taste for the ups and downs of owning your own business and all the things that come with it, including the expecting the unexpected and the slow times.

Brides by Julie made its first sale out of Julie's garage in Edgeley, ND while she was a single mother of two-year-old twins. She bought carpet remnants to cover her garage floor, covered the walls with white tarps, bought racks, and sold her first three gowns from there.

In March of 2016, she decided to put together a trunk show at the Opera House in Lisbon. She soon realized



Julie Ness

that selling out of her garage and trunk shows was not how she wanted to run her business. By June 1 of that same year, she opened her first commercial location, right outside the city of Lisbon. Within a few months, she realized the rent at that location was going to be too much and made the move to

a new location for several years. Next was a location within the newly restored Hammelton building, sharing a space with Flowers, Etc. The pairing was beneficial for both businesses and they went into it knowing they would eventually outgrow the space. (Both the [Hammelton Building](#) and [Flowers, Etc.](#) have published ND SBDC Success Stories.)

The success they both continued to have made that happen sooner than expected, and Julie was on the move again. Now it has





Current location, Main Street, Lisbon, ND

come full circle. Her business has grown enough for her to rent the Opera House space where she had her first trunk show several years ago. She is using 1700SF of the space with continued thoughts on growth and filling the remaining 1300SF of the building.

Throughout the moves and growth, Julie continued to come back to the ND SBDC for assistance. The advisor she worked with was able to assist her in the preparation of numbers and financials for Julie to apply for a regional grant. Julie was successful in obtaining the grant, and with it she was able to buy her first bridal line, which was a key opportunity that has led to business growth.

Julie chose the bridal business because she has always liked fashion and had an interest in sewing early in life. When

her business started she stated, "I know it sounds like a cliché, but I really feel like God put this in front of me, and I really needed a change."

What sets the service Julie provides apart from others is her passion for understanding how women want to feel on these special occasions such as prom or a wedding day. "I strive to

bring out a woman's best attributes so they feel the greatest they can in their special occasion clothes."

Over the years, as she has grown the business and made location changes, one of the biggest challenges Julie has faced is getting her name out there and letting people know the business exists. Finding the time to market the business has been hard for her as up until recently she was the only employee. She has grown enough to add staff now and is excited about the possibilities that brings.

The need for more space over the years has come from expanding her inventory and product offerings. At first, it was only bridal dresses, then she added prom dresses and tuxes, bridesmaid dresses, mother of the bride dresses, and more. In her first prom season,

Julie stocked only 35 dresses, and in recent years, she has stocked upwards of 200 dresses with sales exceeding that number.

The care and exceptional customer service that Julie offers has become her competitive edge. She strives to create the most personalized experience she can for clients while also offering a strong product selection and a willingness to try to find items for clients that she might not have on hand. Additionally, Julie works with a private designer, which allows her to have dresses that cannot be found anywhere else.

COVID-19 was certainly a challenge across the retail industry. Combining that with Julie's specific sector of the retail industry, selling garments for weddings, proms, and formal events and the extraordinary number of canceled or downsized events, means that 2020 was a tough year for her. Once again, however, she turned to the ND SBDC for assistance. Julie was able to apply for and receive PPP and EIDL funding that helped mitigate the effects of COVID on her business.

As things open back up and events are back on the schedule, Julie is pleased to get back to helping people feel their best at these special occasions. When she encounters the next challenge or stage of growth, she knows she will return to the ND SBDC for assistance – and she recommends that other small business owners do the same!

First Trunk Show 2016



First Main Street Location 2016



Hammilton Location 2020

