

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

**They Don't Have MBAs.
They Just had a Good Idea.**

Meet Six Local Women Who Are
Running Their Own Homegrown —
and Successful — Businesses.

[WRITTEN BY LISSA HARNISH POIROT]



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF STEVE GLASS | STEVEGLASSPHOTOGRAPHER.COM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

What MAKES A BUSINESS successful? Is it a staff of hundreds led by business-minded, MBA executives? For six Atlanta-area women, it wasn't ambition and drive that led to running their own businesses. Rather it was the ability to identify a need for a product. Each woman profiled had an "A-ha!" moment and ran with it. Let their success stories inspire you to chase your own dreams.

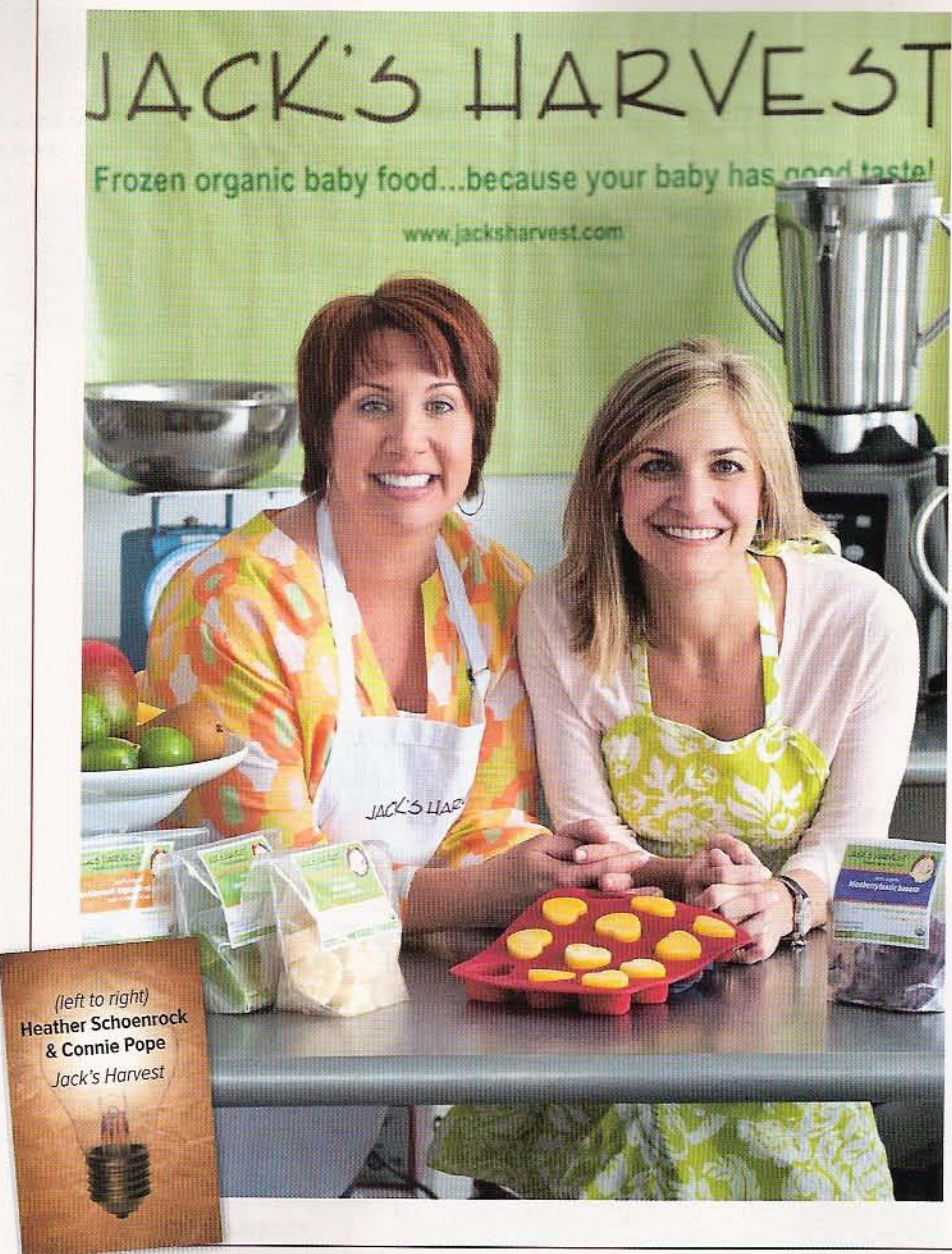
Healthy Babies

When Heather Schoenrock of Duluth began making homemade baby food for her daughter Lucy in 1999, she never had any intention of competing with Gerber. She simply wanted to give Lucy fresh foods rather than processed baby foods found at the store. Her friend Connie Pope of Norcross loved the idea of homemade baby food but didn't want to spend her time in the kitchen, instead asking Schoenrock to make her jars and offering to pay. A few more moms began asking Schoenrock to do the same, and Pope realized they could make a business together.

Both Schoenrock and Pope laugh about their inexperience as businesswomen. Schoenrock, a former computer/IT consultant, and Pope, who was in sales and marketing in the technology industry, both became full-time mothers when their children were born. Launching a business didn't involve a business plan or a traditional approach. Instead, as Schoenrock puts it, they "winged it."

"People just kept calling and asking me to make baby food, so I did. I'm just a mom. As we grew, doors kept opening. We made a few mistakes along the way but they were learning experiences," she said.

Schoenrock's mom loved her daughter's entrepreneurial spirit and gave the



women \$10,000 to start their business, which they named for Schoenrock's youngest son: Jack's Harvest. The women began with babies, taking samples to playgrounds and homes to have babies sample new flavors to see what worked. "Babies were our research and development," laughed Schoenrock, adding, "If they liked it, we had a product."

"We didn't have a business plan but we did have goals," Pope said. "We'd give them a try and if they worked, great! If they didn't, we moved on. We founded the business, got an organic kitchen license, got a kitchen, built online sales, and worked to get into retailers. In March 2007, we met

with Whole Foods to get Jack's Harvest into their stores and by September they were stocking Jack's Harvest in all of their Georgia stores. Now our goal is to get into the Carolinas."

Although Jack's Harvest continues to grow, the women are ready to take on a more business-like approach, working to create a business plan and a budget, something they have yet to do since launching in December 2006. "If I had to do this all over again, from the financial side I would have developed a plan to figure out start-up costs, marketing costs, a plan for what we needed," Pope said. "We really had no idea what we were doing."

■ Women Entrepreneurs

“When I started this business, it wasn’t about money. I felt it was my purpose in life and that became my motivation.”

AGATHA ACHINDU | Yummy Spoonfuls

Similar Paths

In Marietta, another mother was experiencing a similar dilemma. Agatha Achindu, originally from Africa, couldn’t find organic baby foods without preservatives for her newborn. Having been raised to grow and make fresh, healthy foods, Achindu was shocked by America’s growing obesity and diabetes levels in children, something she attributes to unhealthy, processed foods. She started making her own foods, and soon friends began asking her to make them food, then friends of friends, until Achindu realized she, too, had a budding baby food business on her hands. However, she took a straight business approach from the start.

“I went to the Small Business Association (SBA) to learn about starting a business,” said the former software quality assurance engineer. “My best friend is a pediatrician and nutritionist, so I got her thoughts for healthy food, followed the SBA’s advice on creating a business plan, turned to the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture for organic food certification, and took classes on food and nutrition. I took it all very seriously.”

To finance her dream, Achindu and her husband dipped

into their savings, discovering the biggest expense was creating creative branding materials for labels, boxes and marketing materials. She admits that launching the business left her family completely broke, but she never felt nervous. She believed the public would openly accept her company, Yummy Spoonfuls.

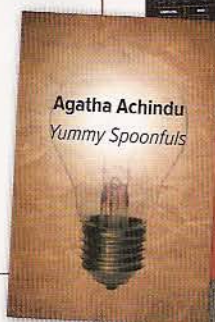
“When I started this business, it wasn’t about money. I felt it was my purpose in life and that became my motivation. I don’t just sell baby food, I teach people how to make their own baby food. I teach workshops at North Fulton Regional Hospital on how to make fresh food without preservatives,

even though I sell it,” Achindu said.

Now operating a full kitchen with a staff of six, Achindu believes the key to anyone’s success in launching their own business is having passion. She said, “You have to really love something and have a passion for doing it. If it’s all about making money you’ll get bored. Owning your own business is very time consuming. I am a wife, a mother, and a businesswoman, and I put in nights and weekends for Yummy Spoonfuls because I am passionate about children having healthy, nutritious foods.”

Fashion Forward

Like many women, Catherine Brehm of Alpharetta loves fashion. But she became increasingly discouraged by her inability to match purses to her clothes, spending hundreds to have purses in every color. She





Elisa Gambino
Via Elisa Fresh Pasta

decided it was time to trim back and sewed a purse for herself, using two fabrics so she could reverse the purse and get twice the wear out of it.

"I've always sewed, so I made a few and then friends started raving about my purses and asking for them. I saw there was a need for reversible purses; a couple of years ago I hired a seamstress, hit the Atlanta Mart with a temporary booth and it took off," Brehm said. "In hindsight, I should have developed a business plan but I

never believed Reverse-a-Purse would be so big. I thought if I could just get into 10 boutiques, I had succeeded. When I got into 10, I said if I could just get into 50 stores. And then 100 stores. I'm in 400 stores and looking to get into 1,000 now."

As successful as Reverse-a-Purse is, Brehm was most surprised at how difficult it is to obtain a small business loan. "Even with flawless credit!" she exclaimed. "It's hard to grow a company when you can't show lenders a history of growth."

Still, Brehm is growing. What began

in her basement has become a factory operation in China with the ability to produce custom fabrics and unique patterns. "Our fabrics cannot be found on anything other than our purses," Brehm said. Her favorite part about being an entrepreneur? "Walking down a street in a city like Chicago and seeing a woman carrying a Reverse-a-Purse on her arm."

No More Meetings

Elisa Gambino had enough. A journalist for CNN for 15 years, her "A-ha!" moment came after one-too-many meetings about storylines that would require hours of scrambling and research only to be scrapped or changed at the final hour. She knew she wanted to do something different. Having lived in Italy for a number of years and struggling to find good, fresh pasta in Atlanta, she decided she would bring pasta to Buckhead. Gambino quit her job, went to Italy and learned how to make pasta, then returned to Atlanta to open Via Elisa Fresh Pasta on Howell Mill Road.

"It took me six months. I went to Italy, I did research and took classes, I called other small business owners for advice, and then I developed a business plan – all on my own," said Gambino, who worked with the Small Business Association on a fast-track program. "I did it all," she added. "I wrote the plan, hired a pasta maker and shop manager so I can run the business, and I handle all the public relations."

After seven years, Gambino now employs a staff of seven and admits that being a business owner can be quite challenging. "You can always put systems in place, which is great when things are going well, but sometimes things come out of left field. Recently we lost power and the shop flooded and we lost our food, for example. Every day I wake up and think it will be a

good day and it's definitely not fun when it's not," she said.

However, Gambino couldn't be happier with her decision to open the shop. "Being my own boss and knowing my business is contributing to the local economy and that my products are bringing joy to customers is very rewarding," she said. "And I never have to sit in another meeting for the rest of my life!"

Beauty Is Skin Deep

No mother likes to see her child in pain. Particularly not Karine Etieue. When her newborn son Eden was born five years ago, he experienced a rash of skin problems. It took a year and a half to diagnose his skin condition and more than a dozen creams to try to correct his extremely dry skin. Although they tried hydrocortisone to treat the inflamed skin, per their doctor's recommendation, they couldn't stop his skin from drying, cracking and blistering. Etieue felt hopeless. That is, until a trip to Israel and a chance run-in at an all-natural skincare store. The owner of the store suggested Etieue try his organic soaps made with olive oil. She started using the soaps on Eden and immediately his skin began to improve. Realizing similar products were not available in the United States, and watching her friends experience similar skin troubles with their own infants, Etieue launched Eden Naturoils in 2007.

"I returned to Israel and did research and worked in partnership with a company there to develop a 100-percent oil-based product line — there is no water, no cream, no preservatives, no perfumes," she said.

Launching the products online meant Etieue did not require much capital at the start — a good thing for the former marketing and human resources employee who admits she doesn't have a good sense for business. "People kept asking for the

NORTHSIDE

To Your Health

Planning Ahead for a Trip to the E.D.

It's the moment you hope never happens - a fall off a bike, tightness in the chest, an asthma attack or a burn - a few things that may require a trip to the emergency department (ED). Understanding your options and having a plan of action before that emergency occurs can reduce the amount of time it takes to get help.



Do your homework – locate the hospital nearest you and call to ask questions...

- Who is on staff in the ED? Are staff trained in emergency medicine? Does the ED have PALS (pediatric advanced life support) certified nurses to treat children?
- How long will the wait be? Are patients seen on the severity of their situation?
- Does your insurance cover ED visits? Call your insurance company to find out which hospital EDs are covered under your plan. Alert your insurance company when you are making a trip to an ED.
- Set your route. How accessible is the hospital to major highways or roads? Figure out multiple driving routes based on time of day, which influences traffic congestion, and set your route ahead of time. Don't wait for an emergency to figure out where to go and how to get there.
- Share with your ED doctor your medical history. Keep an up-to-date medical information card handy for each family member.



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Women Entrepreneurs

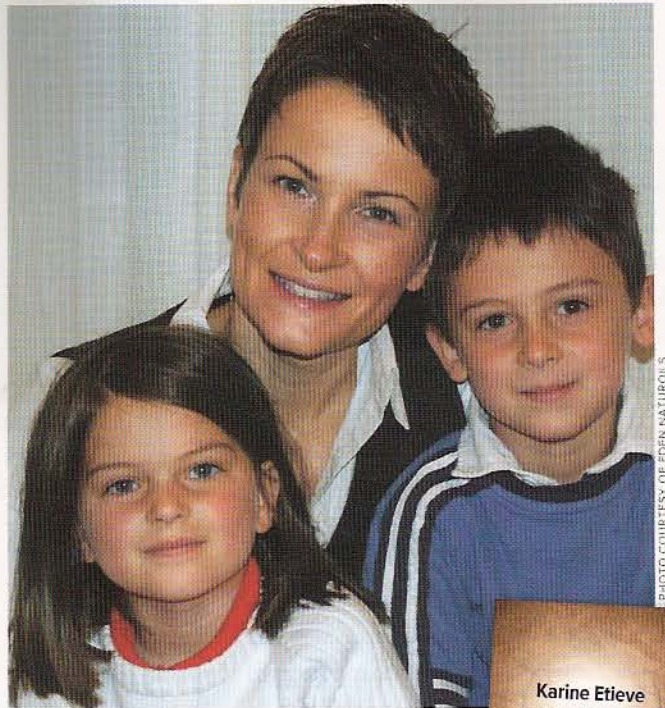
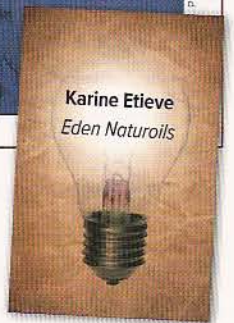


PHOTO COURTESY OF EDEN NATUROILS

Karine Etieve
Eden Naturoils



product, and I saw a need. My husband supported me and we used some of our savings and took out a small business loan to get started. Being online, we didn't need a lot of inventory at the beginning," Etieve said.

Eden Naturoils and its staff of four is now branching into tradeshows and getting into stores, although not as many as Etieve would like, which she attributes to the poor economy. "The economy is troublesome, yes," she admitted. "But demand in Atlanta is growing."

And like her fellow entrepreneurs, Etieve believes the secret of her success is believing in her product and having an answer to a problem that has no solution. "Be energetic," she advised. "You will have a lot of doors closed and you have to be able to keep going to be successful. You'll find doors open again with persistence." **PN**

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