

# FINANCE AND COMMERCE

## Business News

July 25, 2009

### 'Go Home Gorgeous' named semifinalist for state innovation honor

by [Scott Carlson](#) Staff Writer

Four years ago, Rachel Swardson-Wenham gave birth to her third child – and a new business idea.

After giving birth, she recalled, "I looked at my swollen legs, my dry skin and was startled to see how old my bulbous veins made my hands look. I looked terrible and felt awful.

"Additionally, nothing about my (hospital room) environment was very healing in a comforting sense. I craved hydration, soothing music, aroma and someone to tell me it would be OK. I didn't want to just leave the hospital. I wanted to go home gorgeous."

It turned out to be a moment of inspiration, and the start of her plan for a business of the same name.

Founded a year ago, Go Home Gorgeous is now an Edina-based provider of luxury postpartum care and sleep relief for new moms. It has a contract staff of 12 massage therapists (whose attire includes pink doctor-style lab coats) and is expected to post more than \$100,000 in revenue for 2009.

"We have quadrupled our (revenue) projections from the start of the year," said Swardson-Wenham, who was a full-time nanny when she started her company. "We are kicking ass."

Swardson-Wenham, 37, knows from experience that expecting moms often have plenty of resources to support them during their pregnancies but little help during the dreaded "fourth trimester." Hence, the company's main business – providing in-hospital therapeutic massages, shower gifts and other amenities to mothers of newborns.

Go Home Gorgeous is spreading its services to many Twin Cities-area hospitals, with special pricing and services available at Fairview Southdale and Fairview Ridges, Swardson-Wenham said. On Aug. 1, her company's expects to start serving new mothers at Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park.

The company could be on the brink of a national expansion. She's been contacted by a financial adviser on behalf of a client that could "see me into national expansion.

"In this economy as a first-time business owner, single mother with no business experience, I never expected to be approached with financing," said Swardson-Wenham, whose children are now 4, 5 and 7. "We expect to receive final word on this soon. This money will allow us to expand into Chicago and Los Angeles in 2010 as well as into additional hospitals in the Minneapolis area."

Also, organizers of the Minnesota Cup entrepreneurs competition last month named Go Home Gorgeous as one of 10 semifinalists in their general business division for 2009.

The 2009 Cup competition began with more than 1,000 applicants and has been narrowed to 49 semifinalists spanning six categories. The field gets further cut to three finalists in each division by mid-August with an overall grand champion to be named in September.

Swardson-Wenham said she entered the Cup competition at the urging of fellow businessman Joe Keely, CEO of Minneapolis-based College Nannies and Tutors.

"I thought it (the Cup) was a long shot but an intriguing application process," she said. "The questions (from the application) were good and provocative."

When Cup organizers last month held a ceremony unveiling the semifinalists, Swardson-Wenham found that gathering inspiring but also somewhat intimidating because she doesn't have a business degree or background starting and running companies.

But Swardson-Wenham, a former Public Broadcasting Service television producer, said she is an avid researcher and has been able to parlay that skill into assembling and growing her company, along with enlisting the support of business mentors.

"What I have lacked in tangible business experience, I found help from other people and I have farmed it out," she said.

#### Difficult road

Swardson-Wenham's success hasn't come easy. She started the business with \$27,000; \$7,000 from an old IRA and \$10,000 apiece from her comedian/ actor brother Nick Swardson and best friend Martha Champlin.

And then, right about the time her business was starting up, her marriage ended.

"My whole life fell apart," Swardson-Wenham said. But she pressed on, noting that, "I didn't want to let go of this dream, all this hard work and passion. So, I hunkered down."

Last December, Swardson-Wenham pawned her Tiffany & Co. wedding band to cover some costs.

"I still can't believe that I did that," she admitted. "But I would do it again tomorrow in a second. There is nothing, outside of the health and well being of my children, that I am more dedicated or passionate about than seeing new mothers, and families, receive the postpartum support so sadly lacking from our culture today."

Among Go Home Gorgeous' satisfied customers is 31-year-old Vivienne Whitfield; who gave birth in March to a baby boy at St. Joseph's Hospital in St. Paul. The second night after she gave birth to her son, Marcus, Whitfield had a massage from Go Home Gorgeous.

"It was the first time that I had taken for myself since the baby was born where I could literally relax," Whitfield said.

Whitfield joked her only regret is that she didn't think of coming up with the idea first.

"I think it is a phenomenal idea," she said. "She (Swardson-Wenham) has hit the nail on the head."

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