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## Making it her business

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CHRISSY INGRAM

*DAILY NEWS STAFF*

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ALTHOUSE

Everything just so: Roxanne Reed, left, with Elizabeth Hodges, make sure the stock of candles and clothing looks just right at All Fired Up. But stock is only part of the story at the business, which also helps military

Roxanne Reed is doing more than just selling candles and clothing at All Fired Up. She's making dreams come true.

The goal of her company has been to return the profits back to military spouses by helping them start up their own businesses. So far, Reed has helped more than 20 women from her spot at Northwoods Shopping Center.

"Personally it's an absolute thrill not only to see my company grow, but to stand beside these ladies and watch their companies grow from a mere dream," Reed said. "I think I get more excited on their ribbon-cuttings than my own."

In the kitchen

After having a hard time finding work when Reed and her husband were transferred to Camp Lejeune five years ago, she decided to do something on her own.

Reed's candle-making business began shortly after and grew from pouring candles in her home to a storefront on Henderson Drive.

"I started candle-making literally in my kitchen," said Reed from her in-store workshop dotted with shelves of cloth and supplies. "This is a total grassroots business. Wives began asking to be a part of it. It bubbled over from there."

The company sells hand-poured candles in scents with names like "God Bless America" and "Deployment Blues." They also sell a line of "trendy girl" clothing called Jane Wayne Gear, which mixes camouflage and pink.

She hopes customers realize that her products symbolize the "strength, community and union of military wives."

All Fired Up has been nationally recognized by the Marine Corps, Reed said. Products are sold in the exchanges aboard Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton (Calif.). The company has also received support from Marine Corps Community Services.

"Many military organizations have supported us because they know when you purchase a candle, it's going back to support the community of military wives," Reed said.

Roundtable effect

Reed gets phone calls and e-mails every day from wives across the country who want to be a part of her business, she said.

She calls All Fired Up the incubator - where military spouses come to cultivate ideas, learn about business and launch their own.

"A lot of women have the gumption; they just don't have the tools," she said.



Reed has a team of "professional mentors" - all with a connection to the military - to guide people through financial, marketing and advertising issues for their business.

And when the new businesses are running, All Fired Up is always at hand.

"It's like a roundtable effect," Reed said. "They are independent, but can count on us. We had four babies born this year alone, and because of the support system they haven't had to close their stores. If they move to a new duty station, they don't have to close either because of the incubator program."

It's a way, Reed says, that military wives can fulfill their lifelong dreams and ease the worries many military spouses have.

"We've taken the fear out of moving, the fear out of starting a business on their own," Reed said. "No matter where they go in the world, they can still work with us," Reed said.

One military wife, Jenny Warmbir, started up a branch of the store in Japan when her family was moved to their new duty station, Reed said.

Diapers and dealings

Connie Campbell, who had joined All Fired Up, bought The Crop Cupboard, a scrapbook store for the military family, when original owner Donna Gardner had to move to her next duty station.

"I was already renting out a little space and doing 'So Lovely Quilts' when I switched over to the scrap-booking business," Campbell said. "This opportunity allowed me to start a business with low overhead costs, low risk and not have to man it 24-7."

All Fired Up allows Campbell to run her business out of their location. And that allows Campbell to enjoy one of the most important things - being at home with her children.

"A lot of businesses, when you open them, they own you instead of you owning them," she said. "This way I have someone that works there all the time, and it allows me to be a stay-at-home mom and own a small business."

The setup also provides something concrete.

"It's given me something to focus on," she said. "It gives me the flexibility that if we move to our next duty station that I will continue to be able to run my business and not necessarily be in the same town; so it's been extremely positive for my entire family and for the town."

But one of the most important benefits is that it provides an outlet, Campbell said.

"My husband is in workups right now getting ready to deploy in June," she said. "He's been gone quite a bit, and I just told him the other day I am so glad I have this business to look forward to because it helps me have something to focus on other than just him being gone and me missing him."

'In my blood'

Sarah Franklin, whose husband is in the Navy, opened her business, Pride and Joy Country Crafts, through All Fired Up in February 2005. It was something she'd dreamed of.

"I've always wanted to own my own business, I just didn't think it would be a reality," she said. "After talking to Roxanne (Reed) I realized it was a lot easier than I thought it would be."

Franklin sells a variety of hand-painted Americana and country crafts, while being a stay-at-home mom.

"This allows me to have some relaxation and also generate some money to be able to stay at home, which is important to my husband and me," Franklin said.



It's spouses like Franklin that inspired Reed to create such a jumping point for other businesses.

"When I saw that the girls really needed this, it pushed me to go back to school and get my MBA," Reed said. "Now I can help them pursue their endeavors."

Coast to coast

All Fired Up will expand by opening a second store this month in Twentynine Palms, Calif., Reed said. The company will also cross over this year into all "sister branches" of the military. But Reed will continue to seek contractors within the community.

"It's important to look here first because this is truly a company built by military wives for military wives," Reed said. "All product styles reflect the inner circle of our community."

The corporate center for the endeavor, however, will remain in Jacksonville, she said.

"This town has really stepped up to help us support the wives and their career goals," Reed said. "It's been a roller coaster ride, but we've all stuck together. The unity is amazing."

Contact staff writer Chrissy Ingram at [cingram@freedomenc.com](mailto:cingram@freedomenc.com) or by calling 353-1171, ext. 239.

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