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A makeover for ID badges

Many business partners who live in the same city have difficulty reaching \$1 million in annual revenue; sisters-in-law Kimberly Martinez and Lisa Harrington, of Bonitas International, reached that goal living nearly 1,000 miles from each other.

"We use a technology-based platform and are all about results and entrepreneurship," said Martinez, calling from Sarasota, Fla.

"Gone are the days of managers counting heads," she said. "We're a super, high-technology company and it lets us manage our personal and professional lives."

In operation for three years, Bonitas is based in Burton and specializes in BooJee Beads: A line of stylish jewelry for the display of employee identification badges.

"(Wearing an ID badge) is a whole process -it's made out of cheap plastic and not anyone's first choice as a fashion accessory over a carefully chosen outfit," said Martinez, a Newbury High School graduate.

"So we provide a fun, fashionable and affordable way to wear one."

The company's customer service center is in Burton, while a warehouse is located in the Newbury Business Park.

Harrington, who lives in Cincinnati, knew she had more than an idea when many of her co-workers at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital wanted to wear one of her necklaces.

"My daughter was 8 years old at

the time and used to give me string necklaces to give me something to go to work with," Harrington said of the idea's origins.

"We did it as a little project to make her understand math and how a business works; soon, we couldn't keep up with demand."

Martinez was "blown away" by the success, Harrington said.

"She's the one who had the vision and the belief that we could make it into a big business," Harrington said of Martinez.

The products are available in 1,200 retail outlets in the United States as well as the product Web site, www.boojeebeads.com.

The partners' hard work was recognized in June when they were one of 20 female-headed companies recognized as part of the 2006 "Make Mine a Million \$ Business" program in San Francisco. The program was sponsored by Count Me In for Women's Economic Independence and American Express.

According to Count Me In, the program is held to economically empower women, as only 4 percent of female-owned businesses realize \$1 million in annual sales despite comprising nearly 50 percent of U.S. businesses.

"The recognition has been great, but the biggest piece is that we now belong to a community of like-minded individuals," Martinez said. "We have a network of other women businesses that share our same goals."

Martinez says Bonitas' desire for such a community played a part in the company's decision to create work projects, including manufacturing, in disadvantaged areas in Haiti and South Africa.

"During my first trip to South Africa, I saw people that couldn't guarantee their kids food," Martinez said. "We try as much as we can to direct manufacturing to areas that need it."

"We decided when we built our business that you can create your business to be in line with your values," Martinez said.

Old friends from Newbury aren't surprised by her success, Martinez said. Even as a youth, she was able to see a world much bigger than small-town Newbury.

"I've always had a global perspective and couldn't wait to get to the big cities," Martinez said. "My friends are proud but not surprised."

While the future holds more sales and company expansion, accolades like the program sponsored by Count Me In and American Express are always welcome.

"That was a nice validation of something we already knew," Harrington said of being recognized nationally.

"We're strongly committed in what we do and it was very nice to have someone else believe that as well."

For more information, call (888) 726-6533 or visit www.bonitasinternational.com and www.boojeebeads.com.