

This Print Shop Runs on Girl Power

Eugene local Amy Baker starts her own female-run, eco-friendly screen printing business out of her garage.

By: Shannon Daehnke

On a Thursday afternoon in the middle of the work day, Amy Baker was not in her usual spot at her desk answering business calls. Instead, she was sitting on a plastic chair in front of her print shop, dressed in a blue jumpsuit and sunglasses. She looked like a delivery woman on a top-secret mission. Her five employees sat in a row behind her, wearing matching outfits. Baker held a Frisbee up to her chest like a steering wheel as the team swayed around behind her, mimicking the motion of a van. Baker was in the process of filming a kick-starter campaign video to raise money to purchase a company delivery van for her business. After the team's "delivery" was completed, they unbuckled their imaginary seatbelts and got out of their makeshift van. "We'll keep making shirt happen- just help us get a new set of wheels," said Baker.

Baker is the owner and founder of Threadbare Print House, Eugene's only female-run, water-based screen-printing business. Threadbare is home to five in-house artists who create original pieces for their clients. Many of their custom designs have become the familiar logos of several local businesses in Eugene such as Barnlight, Tacovore, and The Kiva. Threadbare prints their art on everything from t-shirts to tote bags to posters.

Over the last four years, as her business has grown, Baker has had to transition her original intention to create art into a heavier focus on the business side of things. But she always manages to incorporate a creative flare, and runs Threadbare her own way. Baker runs her print shop on girl power, inspired by her kids.

On a rainy afternoon in 2010, Baker watched as her two children, aged one and three, frolicked around her quaint Eugene home. Baker's friend and neighbor Jaylene Nuñez accompanied her, with her kids in tow as well. As their children played pirates and built fairy houses in the backyard, the two moms sat at the kitchen table and devised a plan. They decided that they were going to teach themselves how to screen print. The two began their business research that very day, and made a remarkable discovery. Online, they found a free blueprint on how to build an at-home screen printing machine entirely out of two by fours. Baker and Nuñez planned to construct the homemade machine right there in Baker's garage. And thus- Threadbare was born.

"I found creative inspiration in spending time with my kids at home," said Baker. "Kids' stuff is so cute and fun, it motivated me to create something original."

Baker spent the majority of her time as a stay-at-home mom after her kids were born. Her original intention was to create a children's clothing line, and sell the tees primarily to the other moms from her kids' school. This process was primarily a creative outlet for Baker, but she also got to make some money out of it. Baker's hobby began to transform into a much more serious business when a divorce left her with a need to make a substantial living for herself.

Baker had no experience in running a business, and certainly had no idea how to go about mass screen-printing. But her status as a Eugene local and small, previously established client list allowed her to market her business effectively.

A longtime friend of Baker's who worked at The Kiva grocery store informed her that the business was looking for a snazzy new logo. They decided to give Baker a shot, and the rest was history. Well, not exactly. Baker was a one-woman business back then, and had to design and create each order entirely by herself. So, of course she butchered a few of her first legit orders.

"I look back at those original prints I did and I cringe," said Baker. "I don't even know why they gave me another chance at it- but I'm sure glad they did."

Born in Ashland, Oregon, Baker grew up living in cities all over Oregon, due to her parents' business ventures. Baker originally wanted to pursue an art degree, but her parents told her that she would not get any use out of it. At first Baker was disheartened by this, but she soon came to realize that her mind was more business-oriented, just like her parents'. So, she decided to manage artists as a way to incorporate both of her passions.

"I try to model my business in the same way that my Mom ran hers. She would be doing the everyday restaurant employee tasks like waiting tables and filling the ice cream machine, and then would go in the back to work on the books," said Baker.

As you look around Threadbare Print House, you can see that Baker's mother may have inspired her daughter in more ways than one. Pink t-shirts with various "Girl Power" logos are on almost every mannequin in the shop. Being almost entirely female-run is not only important to Baker's business model, but also is one of the traits about her business that she values the most.

"The print-shop industry is typically male-dominated, so it's really empowering to me to be a woman in this industry who employs primarily women," said Baker.

Business has been very successful for Baker in the last four years especially. Although her business is acclaimed locally within Eugene, Baker and her team have created designs for companies all over the United States- from Hawaii to Alaska. Within the last two years, Baker has moved Threadbare from her garage to an artsy warehouse in downtown Eugene- where all the magic happens.

The five employees who make up the Threadbare team truly embody Baker's motto of being "artist driven." The sheer talent and charisma of her employees have made the business transition much easier and more enjoyable for Baker. However, the task of divvying up all the creative parts to her employees leaves Baker with handling only the business side of things. Her next step is learning how to do both.

“I know Amy misses creating art and being more involved behind the scenes, but she has brought Threadbare to where it is today. I was the first employee she hired. She is such an empowering boss,” said Threadbare employee Ky Francois.

It is around closing time at Threadbare Print House, and employee Ky Francois comes into Baker’s office with a proposition for her to look over some of his designs for a local woman’s center. Baker smiles at the opportunity to get away from her desk, and focus on the creative for a little while.



Amy Baker, owner and founder of Threadbare Print House in Eugene wearing a Threadbare original t-shirt in her warehouse.