



# BEING BRAVE

## The Sisters of the Door Store and Windows

by McKenzie Nalley

If you had been there when Ann Gregory and her father started the business and asked her whether she and her sister Laurie Scarborough planned in 20 years' time to be co-owners of one of the region's most successful home outfitters, I'm certain she would have just laughed.

She probably would have laughed much harder than she did with me a few weeks back when I posed the same question.

"No, we never planned anything," Ann chuckled. "We planned nothing. It all just kind of happened."

A modest answer but one that belies the immense dedication and courage that keeps an operation like theirs alive. The Door Store and Windows story began in 1993 with Ann and Laurie's father entering into a partnership to open a manufacturer of residential steel replacement doors in South Louisville. Laurie joined the manufacturing plant, working on the production side of the fenestration business shortly after. In 1997 Ann and her father opened a retail store.

"I was basically Laurie's customer," Ann said of the beginning. "She manufactured the doors, and I sold them and installed them. When our family decided to sell that [manufacturing] business, I asked her to come work with me." That was 13 years ago, and they've been partners ever since.

Door Store and Windows emerged onto the Louisville building scene during the heyday of the late '90s and early 2000s' industry boom. To get a foothold, Ann and Laurie distinguished themselves by being the only local supplier geared toward homeowners rather than builders.

"If you were an individual homeowner and wanted to buy a door and have it installed," Laurie explained, "you had to go to a big-box store or a lumber store, and you had to figure out how to measure it and do it all yourself."

Door Store and Windows, however, had the advantage of being a turnkey, one-stop shop geared to consumers. This, combined with its appeal of being a locally owned, family-run business, helped ease homeowners' worries during the process. The sisters also say that customers considered a woman-owned business a positive, often believing it brought an extra level of attention to detail. Ann, however, thinks this is "just a generalization," attributing their thoroughness, which is absolutely real, instead to their stellar team-hiring practices.

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Laurie Scarborough

According to her, they only bring in employees who are exceptionally detail-oriented and whose values fall in line with their own.

While being women in the building industry can be a way to stand out, the sisters say it has also come with its own unique challenges. Although advances in technology and changes in social mores have allowed more women into what was once an exclusively physical and male-dominated industry, dated attitudes persist. Ann recounted the numerous times customers had walked into their store

only to be shocked by her in-depth knowledge of the industry.

"You have to know more than everybody else," Laurie added. "You have to be brave — you can be the voice of your business, and you don't have to stay behind the scenes."

Bravery is perhaps the defining characteristic of the sisters and their success. In 2009 when the U.S. housing market collapsed and spurred the world's largest recession since the '30s, as members of the building industry, Ann and Laurie found themselves at recession ground zero. As similar businesses folded around them, any other owner would have initiated layoffs. Instead, the sisters began hiring. When those businesses closed, they were able to recruit the best of the industry while others were afraid to do so. They cornered the installation market for existing homeowners, even though no new homes were being built. They survived with audacity, a hopeful tenacity that Laurie encapsulated with the following anecdote:

"It was the first six months after the crash, and we had had a fairly decent six months. We didn't make much money, we really didn't make any, but we gave all our team a bonus. It was just a leap of faith."

Twenty-plus years of ups and downs. Being women business owners in a man's industry. The worst recession most of us have ever seen. Time in and out, they've survived it all by doing what the rest were afraid to do. They survived by being brave. 🍷