

Small Business OF THE YEAR AWARDS

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JUNE 2010

{WOMAN ENTREPRENEURIAL EXCELLENCE}

JANET HAMEL SOLOMON



Photos by Stephanie Hannum
Key Sailing owner **Jan Solomon** aboard Key Breeze

WINNER

In 1999, Key Sailing owner Janet Hamel Solomon returned home — and there is no place like home for this entrepreneur. Daughter of Sarasota symphony violinist Jean Hamel and Chaplain J.D. Hamel, the namesake of the Bayfront veterans park, Solomon holds tight to her hometown Sarasota roots.

Along with her childhood sweetheart, Tim, by her side, Solomon serves up a daily dose of joy to anyone that steps on her vessel, Key Breeze, which boasts having travelled 20,000 miles with almost 10,000 guests in the last three years. Her joy comes from providing customers with an experience that is intimate and customized; her trips have been rated as Sarasota's most popular tourist attraction for two years running on Trip Advisor.

The secret behind Solomon's success began with a tragedy and life-changing experience. Solomon suffered facial nerve dam-

age from an attempted kidnapping while living as a missionary in Colombia, but she chose to live with the pain and smile through it, which she does best.

"I am not defined by my physical pain," she says. "If anything, I am marked by the blessing of a second chance at life."

That smile and joyful attitude keeps clients returning for dolphin-sighting cruises, romantic sunset cruises and even weddings out on the water. (Solomon's husband is a U.S. Coast Guard master captain and minister.)

"I feel I'm a successful entrepreneur because I can work 24/7 and never feel like I'm working, because there is no way this is a 'job,'" says Solomon. "Success on the Key Breeze is when every single guest has such a personalized experience that they feel they have their own sailing yacht on hold for family and friends."

Solomon says her success comes from putting in the hard work to make her dream a reality. "We don't realize we are in

AT A GLANCE

ADDRESS: Docked at Marina Jack, P.O. Box 51173, Sarasota

START DATE: 2007

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES WHEN STARTED: Two

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES NOW: Two

ADVICE: "My advice is to try to do something impossible, because anyone can do the alternative. Live your dreams!"

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: "The biggest challenge for our business is weather. We always have a waiting list of guests who want to sail, but I have canceled for rain, gale-force winds and any condition that makes for less than a five-star experience."

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR BUSINESS ONE YEAR FROM NOW: "In a year I hope that as many locals and global tourists know where the Key Breeze is docked as they do where to find the Unconditional Surrender statue."

business, because we're having so much fun," says Solomon. "No one who works on a yacht in Sarasota with their childhood sweetheart should complain about anything."

—Stephanie Hannum

FINALISTS

Judith V. Cuppy

Address: Senior Home Companions Inc., 3902 Somerset Drive, Sarasota

Start Date: 1992



Alex Miller

Address: Mercedes Medical Inc., 7590 Commerce Court, Sarasota

Start date: 1993 (Miller started in 1995)

