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PEOPLE

# Scripted success

*Louann Richards' penchant for calligraphy grows into a Tualatin printing company*

By **DANA TIMS**  
THE OREGONIAN

As unlikely as it seems, Louann Richards' career in professional printing began with the graceful, intricate art of calligraphy.

"I was fascinated by it," said Richards, who at the time, in the early 1980s, was working as a teacher's aid in an elementary school. "Every-

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

thing else just evolved from there."

Evolved is right. Richards, whose two daughters became business partners, recently celebrated 10 years as owner of Graphic Expressions printing company in Tualatin. The business offers custom printing, copying, design and other services, including a specialty known as fulfillment.

Having traveled a business route that started in a West Linn garage and now occupies 15,000 square feet in Tualatin's sprawling industrial sector, Richards took a few minutes recently to reflect on how a calligrapher's brush helped her found an enterprise that recorded just over \$1 million in sales last year.

**Q:** How did you get into the printing business?

**A:** Calligraphy. I was working as a teacher's aide, and a teacher at the school got many of us involved. I just enjoyed that so much. It drew me to Mt. Hood Community College's graphic technology program. I got my degree and started selling printing for a local printer in 1983.

**Q:** What happened to change that?

**A:** I'd been selling for them for about 10 years. At that point, one of my daughters (Cindy Richards Duyck) and a lifelong friend and I decided our focus needed to change to include computers. Up until that time, computers hadn't been a huge part of the printing business. We felt that was going to change.

We started our company in our



**Louann Richards (right) started her Graphic Expressions printing business 10 years ago in a West Linn garage. A decade later, with help from her daughters, Cindy Richards Duyck (left) and Kim Spickerman, Richards runs a business that tops \$1 million in annual sales.**

ROBERT BACH  
THE OREGONIAN

## GRAPHIC EXPRESSIONS

**Owner:** Louann Richards  
**Age:** 55  
**Where:** Tualatin  
**What:** Printing business  
**Milestone:** Just celebrated 10th year  
**Customer base:** 300 and counting

garage in West Linn on Jan. 17, 1994. Just the two of us. We had high-speed duplicating equipment, and we brokered all offset printing and all other services. During that time, I'd developed a close relationship with one of my vendors, who had gotten burned out on printing. We bought the company, Graphic Expressions, from her in August 1994 and were on our way:

**Q:** Your Web site says your services include "fulfillment." What is that?

**A:** It's a different aspect of printing, where we house all the literature for a particular company. We house their product. Then, people who are authorized to receive their product send orders to us via e-mail. We gather whatever that request entails and ship it where it needs to go.

**Q:** How is it working with family? (Richards' other daughter, Kim Spickerman, joined the company in 1998, when it expanded to include fulfillment services.)

**A:** It's wonderful, yet stressful. It's wonderful in that we see each other every day. The girls see each

other's families, which makes it easier to keep in touch since we're all so busy. But there are always family issues that haven't been worked out yet. When you involve money, those issues become even more stressful. But it's a blessing that we're working together. It gives us a chance to work on those interpersonal things.

**Q:** What's the most stressful job you've handled?

**A:** We had a job where we were printing on plastic and ink rubbed off of it when the product was touched repeatedly. The pieces looked beautiful right after printing, but we were horrified to see the ink lift off after it was touched. I had to work nights to figure out a solution. We ended up spraying a caustic spray fix on the plastic after it was printed. We solved it, but it was very stressful.

**Q:** How has the business changed since you've been in it?

**A:** A lot of the technology has improved. With proofs, for instance, I used to have to physically take them to a customer. The job couldn't go forward until it was

OK'd. We now send electronic proofs so customers can see almost instantly what we've created. Then they just e-mail us back whether they like it or not.

**Q:** Just how big is the company these days?

**A:** We're in a big old warehouse with about 15,000 square feet in Tualatin. The building had been abandoned for about two years before we worked out a deal to move our fulfillment side in there in August. We just had it totally renovated, but it's still a big old warehouse. I wish we had enough money to make it great, but at least it's livable. People seem to like how it looks.

**Q:** With \$1 million a year in sales, you must be doing something right.

**A:** We like to think so. This makes for a really nice environment for grandkids and daughters. When children come here, they can go outside and pick berries. It's a very nice place to be.

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