

# Home-based Small Business of the Year *Love Rocks Me, Ellen Thayer*



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SPECIAL SECTIONS MANAGING EDITOR

Creativity has always been an important aspect of Ellen Thayer's life. A former TV meteorologist, she's exhibited her oil paintings, driftwood sculptures, shell art, and photographs of the state of Maine designed with heart rocks in several galleries and retail shows, but said there was no promise of a steady, reliable income.

"Then I took two free courses offered by New Ventures Maine: Business Basics and New Ventures Entrepreneurship Training," Thayer said. "These classes were instrumental in demystifying all aspects of business planning and helping me to create a niche as an artist."

The networking and mentoring that resulted provided more opportunities for Thayer to learn business fundamentals and to "test market" new design ideas through the Top Gun Prep and Scale Up programs and the Women Standing Together organization.

The result was Love Rocks Me, which Thayer started five years ago. Her hard work has paid off and she has been named this year's Small Business Administration Home-based Small Business of the Year, nominated

by Gigi Guyton of New Ventures Maine.

"While I've worked very hard at growing my business, if it wasn't for my wестie [West Highland White Terrier], Winston, there may not have been a Love Rocks Me," Thayer said. "Our countless beach walks over the years have resulted in my vast collection of heart-shaped rocks (roughly 500). I also have to thank the many retailers who have carried my line and encouraged my creativity. I now have 165 designs!"

After securing working capital, which included family investors who helped initially, the greatest challenge for Thayer has been finding enough hours in the day to run all aspects of the business while still being able to innovate.

"I am very self-motivated and have a thirst for knowledge, but I've learned there were areas — such as bookkeeping and social media strategy — where outside assistance would save me time in the long run."

She credits her meteorology career with giving her the entrepreneurial skills it has taken to persevere.

"I was the sole person in the weather office where I determined the weather story and created the forecast and graphics to tell that story," she said. "It required a high

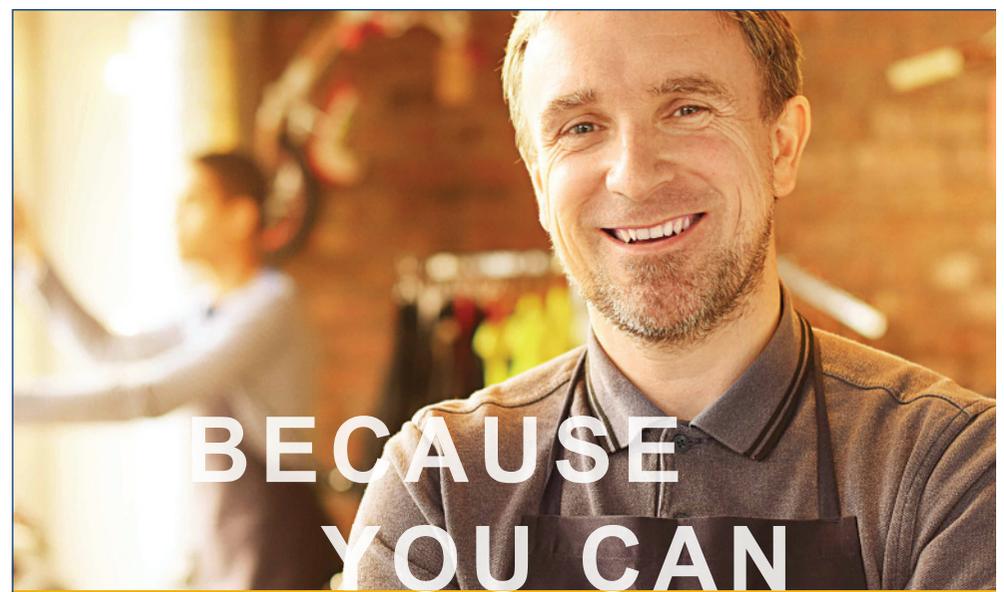
level of organization and computer skills, both of which have been essential in growing my business."

As for role models, like many who have been successful in business, Thayer cites her parents as people to look up to in business and in life.

"My late father was an entrepreneur and my mother, at nearly 80-years-old, is still very active lives life to the fullest," Thayer said. "Also, the many creative Maine entrepreneurs I've come to know are a wonderfully warm community — most are willing to offer advice and support and are true inspirations."



COURTESY OF ELLEN THAYER



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