

Gabberdine Gourmet Case Study  
Morgantown, West Virginia  
August 4, 2010  
Finee Ruffin, Jones County Junior College  
Coleman/Hughes Scholarship Participant in  
Bernelli American Spirit Program

Teaching Topics

*Financial Management, Advertising, Marketing, Culinary Arts, Catering,  
Hospitality Management, Hospitality Services, Female/Women  
Entrepreneur, Serial Entrepreneur*

## I. Case Synopsis

As an entrepreneur in the catering industry Donna Gabberdine measures her catering success by the size of her van. Donna, being a serial entrepreneur at age 28, had many successes and failures in life before most students even enroll in college. Through her years of experience she has created a thriving catering business without spending one cent for advertising or marketing.

## II. Background

### A. Products and Services

Acutely aware of the needs in the Morgantown, West Virginia area Donna Gabberdine brought a complete catering service to the market. The *Gabberdine Gourmet* menu consists of :

- We Roast Pigs Menu (widest variety of complete menu items)
- Themed Buffet Packages (ranging in price of \$12 - \$20 per person and complete with themed decor)
- Mama G Food Services (contract umbrella for summer camps, fraternity, and sorority house catering)
- Party Trays (tail gates, birthday parties, and other tailored events)
- Hors d'oeuvres Menu (both hot and cold)
- Breakfast Menu

*Gabberdine Gourmet* required that each event customer provide a 33% deposit

of the total food cost in order to hold the event date. With that 33% deposit Donna ordered all of the food needed for the event's preparation but was still protected from a customer cancellation with a complete non-refundable deposit parameter set forth by *Gabberdine Gourmet*.

The travel radius for *Gabberdine Gourmet* is set by the length of time for travel and not necessarily by the travel mileage. The maximum travel time is one and half-hours. Due to the restraints of the mountains region

and the travel conditions this limit was strictly enforced.

## B. Company History

Donna Gabberdine started *We Roast Pigs* in 2003 in rural Morgantown, West Virginia. She moved back home to Morgantown after a stint in the Carolina's, working in the Culinary Arts field as an Executive Chef. Donna saw the need for an Executive Chef in an off-site catering company in Morgantown, and she had the training and experience to launch that venture. The business started as *We Roast Pigs* but quickly adopted the official name *Gabberdine Gourmet*. Donna felt that the original name gave the business less creditability than the current name. She has seen tremendous growth in her business over the last seven years, growing from a simple BBQ business to a complete catering service for large-scale events such as weddings, reunions, meetings, retreats, and even contracts for daily in-facility catering.

Currently *Gabberdine Gourmet* employs three full-time employees, in addition to Donna, with supplementary employees hired on an event needed basis. Donna has 100% ownership in *Gabberdine Gourmet*. She shared her management of events with her husband, who also performed all of the needed grillwork for an event. While her husband helped with events, he maintained his own full-time job outside of *Gabberdine Gourmet*. Donna also had two children under the age of 10 that she allowed to help with event preparation. They were allowed to husk corn, peel potatoes, wash dishes, and pack prep materials for off-site events. However, Donna felt that it was unprofessional to have her children attend any events with her so an attendance guideline was established within *Gabberdine Gourmet* and the Gabberdine Family.

*Gabberdine Gourmet* also had three yearly contracts that maintained the company's positive cash flow in the first quarter of each year. The first contract consisted of a weekly dinner open to the public and members of the

Elks Lodge in Morgantown, West Virginia. Elks Lodge dining saw an increase of 50 – 60 patrons on Wednesday nights within in the first two months of the *Gabberdine Gourmet* contract. The Elks Lodge dining also had an increase of 100 – 125 patrons on Friday nights after the *Gabberdine Gourmet* contract was established. The second contract was with a Fraternity House on the campus of West Virginia University in Morgantown. The contract consisted of *Gabberdine Gourmet* preparing and delivering dinner for the Fraternity House Monday – Thursday during nine months per year. The third and final contract was for a private family in the Morgantown, West Virginia area. *Gabberdine Gourmet* prepared and delivered diner for a family of five daily during all twelve months of the year.

### **III. Entrepreneur**

#### **a. Pre-K**

Donna was born to parents with very safe ideas of employment. Her father worked as a route salesman and her mother for the Department of Motor Vehicles. She discovered quickly that she was a Latch-Key child with no hope for that to change. She craved home-cooked meals throughout her days home alone so she began to experiment with her grandmother’s recipes. Her development started small by preparing meals for herself, then expanded through offering meals to friends who were also Latch-Key children within her neighborhood. She felt great gratification from the enjoyment others received from her cooking.

#### **b. Teen**

As a teenager Donna developed a love for decorating events as her passion for culinary arts began. She often catered small family birthday parties and included the party décor and music within her party package. For additional money during the holiday season she would prepare trays of cookies, cakes, and other holiday sweet treats to sell to the local community. After her first year of the holiday cookie trays she established a name for

herself and began getting some repeat customers on other holidays and special occasions.

At 17 Donna started her own tanning bed and aerobics business, while still maintaining her holiday cookie tray business. She had success with this business but realized tanning/aerobics was not where her passion was directed. After selling her tanning bed and aerobics business she enrolled in Culinary Arts School.

c. 20's

Donna began her twenties as a catering entrepreneur in her first official catering business called *Almost Heaven*. She struggled through the intricacies of the state policies in establishing a catering business with a minimum amount of investment. Due to her pregnancy she sold her business and took a new position, complete with benefits, as the Head Chef and Food Service Manager with West Virginia University. After the birth of her children she left West Virginia University and again started her own catering business known today as *Gabberdine Gourmet*.

d. Character of the Entrepreneur

Donna is a self-proclaimed "controller" of life. She has identified her want of control as the main motivation for being an entrepreneur. She prided herself in hard work and quality product and staked her business on that method. As she reflected on her early experiences she recalled leadership in activities always being her strength and financial management her weakness.

e. Support System

Donna felt her backbone of support was found in her husband. When asked whether her business would suffer without a strong marriage she said "most definitely". The business would not succeed without both individuals being fully committed to each other and to the business. As for other support members of her family she is limited. Her mother was her early financial manager and was fired for mismanagement of funds so support from the parental standpoint is lacking in many ways.

f. Cultural Heritage

Living in the rural hills of Morgantown, West Virginia influenced Donna to build relationships that last. This small town environment encouraged the relationships needed to start and maintain a small business. It is with these relationships that *Gabberdine Gourmet* has spent absolutely no money on advertising during its seven years of operations. The company's growth was mainstreamed from word-of-mouth and repeat business.

#### **IV. The Environment**

- a. Geography - Monongalia County, with a population of 90,000 people, is located in the north central part of West Virginia. Morgantown, the county seat, is the educational, medical, cultural and commercial hub of the region. Morgantown is home to West Virginia University, one of the top research universities in the country, with an enrollment of more than 28,000 students.
  - i. Highway Distance – Pittsburgh, PA 77 miles; Charleston, WV 155 miles; Columbus, OH 205 miles; Cleveland, OH 219 miles; Washington, DC 219 miles; Baltimore, MD 215 miles; Philadelphia, PA 327 miles; and Charlotte, NC 385 miles.
  - ii. Climate – January average high 39° F, July average high 83° F.
- b. Economic
  - i. Ten Largest Employers
    1. West Virginia University
    2. West Virginia University Hospitals
    3. Mylan Pharmaceuticals, Inc.
    4. Monongalia County Board of Education
    5. West Virginia University Medical Corporation
    6. Monongalia General Hospital
    7. Wal-Mart Associates, Inc.
    8. Teletch Customer Care Management (WV), Inc.
    9. Gabriel Brothers, Inc.
    10. GMRI, Inc.

- ii. Business Taxes
  - 1. Corporate Net Income Tax
  - 2. Business Franchise Tax
- iii. Income
  - 1. Average Household Income - \$40,267
  - 2. Average Home Cost - \$173,000
- c. Education
  - i. Elementary Schools – 12
  - ii. Middle Schools – 6
  - iii. High Schools – 5 (10,294 total student enrollment)
  - iv. Technical Centers – 1
  - v. Junior College – 1, West Virginia Junior College
  - vi. Universities – 1, West Virginia University
- d. Religion – There are more than 70 different congregations representing 30 different religious affiliations in Monongalia County.
- e. Family Structure
  - 29.1% of homes in Morgantown were married couples living together
  - 7 % of homes had a female householder with no husband present
  - 61.2% of homes were non-families
  - 37.3% of all households were made up of individuals
  - 9.5% of households had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older
- f. Cultural Background
  - i. Race/Ethnicity
    - White – 82,060 91.8%
    - African American – 3,640 4.0%
    - Asian/Other – 2,480 2.8%
    - Hispanic – 1,240 1.4%

## V. Sources

Personal Communication with Donna Gabberdine July 29, 2010

<http://www.morgantown.org/profile2010.pdf>

**VI.** Teaching Notes

- a. What are some methods that Donna can use to maximize her business?
- b. From an advertising standpoint what things could Donna do to attract more business?
- c. What are some new areas of SMERF markets that Donna could focus on expanding her business and growing her market share?