



SBDC Success Story

Mosquito Joe of Madison

Franchise owner Kate Reithel combines her love of gardening and community

For much of her career, Kate Reithel was a buyer for Marshall Fields and Macy's, responsible for figuring out what customers would want to purchase and handling vendor negotiations. But the idea of running her own business had been on her mind since high school.

"When I was fifteen, I worked for a woman-owned, brand-new McDonald's franchise, and it was fascinating to watch her call the shots and turn it into what she wanted," says Reithel. "It's exciting to energize a team to become a successful franchise, and small business ownership has always appealed to me."

Reithel worked with a consultant to identify potential franchise opportunities and began a structured exploration process with timed calls, each with a specific agenda and prep work.

"If you want to continue, they give

you references of existing franchise owners, who gave me good insights on whether this fit what I was looking to do in my next career," says Reithel. "Then, you go to the corporate office and meet the corporate team. If everyone feels it's a fit for both sides, and they feel they can set you up to be successful, you sign up and go there for a week of training."

Reithel bought her Mosquito Joe franchise in February 2018 and launched the business in April 2018.

The corporate office handles computer systems and product development.

"We didn't have to buy or evaluate systems," Reithel says. "We just plug right into theirs. Their team analyzes the products we will use. It's really effective."

Reithel provides computers and trucks, and she handles employ-

ee payroll, partnering with Madison-based accounting, legal, and marketing professionals.

"You find your own core group to support your local entity," she explains.

After Reithel's first season, she signed up for a finance class at the UW-Madison SBDC and met SBDC Business Consultant Amy Bruner Zimmerman. When Reithel learned about the SBDC's consulting services, she signed up immediately and began working with Zimmerman in the winter of 2019.

"She's been working with me



ever since,” says Reithel. “She’s emotionally tied to me and my success, and she’s very good at keeping me focused and on the right path. Amy is the voice of reason.”

Reithel has formed collegial relationships with the SBDC team.

“One thing you lose when you leave the corporate world is your team, and the SBDC has almost become that for me,” says Reithel. “I can check in with Amy and say, ‘Amy, can you double check my P&L?’”

For roles like accountants and marketers, the SBDC provides recommendations. Mosquito Joe franchises have independence in their marketing, so Reithel is able to collaborate with local marketing experts. She works with the Cap Times advertising team and WKOW to produce commercials.

“So much of our marketing budget gets to stay here locally,” says Reithel. “The money coming in is from our local community, and we invest it back into the people who live here.”

Reithel has found that the best way to market her busi-



ness is through customers.

“We have people who give us Google reviews and a bonus referral program,” she says. “We’ve sponsored softball fields in Sun Prairie and partnered with KEVA in Middleton. We’re learning who our customer base is and what their interests are.”

Reithel says she has gathered customer feedback from the moment she launched.

“One customer said, ‘If you’re not dependable, you’re expendable,’ and that’s become our mantra,” Reithel says. “Are we adding value? Making a difference in a positive way?”

Now, Zimmerman and Reithel are working through a new franchise concept.

Reithel says it’s important to examine franchise opportunities to make sure they fit for both the prospective franchise owner and their community.

“You have to always question that about a franchise model,” Reithel says. “It may be fantastic on the East Coast, but does it make sense for us here in our community?”

To learn more about this success story, visit sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/success-stories/

The UW-Madison Small Business Development Center supports businesses in Dane, Sauk, and Columbia Counties.

