

Burgess Commercial Real Estate Gives New Opportunities at Hessed House

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In 1995, Laurel Gabrielson, a.k.a. “the soup lady”, started selling dry soup mixes out of her home. A mom of three, she began with winter-season craft fairs held in her living room. As word of her delicious soup mixes spread, the soup lovers streamed into her house, and she branched out to selling her soup mixes at area craft shows.

Aurora, IL (December 6, 2010) – What do a commercial real-estate developer and “the soup lady” have in common? *A vision for changing lives.*

In 1995, Laurel Gabrielson, a.k.a. “the soup lady”, started selling dry soup mixes out of her home. A mom of three, she began with winter-season craft fairs held in her living room. As word of her delicious soup mixes spread, the soup lovers streamed into her house, and she branched out to selling her soup mixes at area craft shows.

Gabrielson continued to work full time for a book wholesaler while growing this booming business, spending most of her free time and days off making mixes, planning for craft shows and keeping her business running smoothly.

But in 2008, an impending job transfer threatened to end the business. “The transfer involved a long commute and there was no way I’d be able to handle both of these things,” remembers Gabrielson. “I knew I would only have been able to run the business poorly, and if I couldn’t do it well, I didn’t want to do it at all.”

As word got out that the soup lady’s soups would no longer be available, many loyal



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customers expressed their sorrow. One customer, upon receipt of a large final order, sent payment with a note that said “My family really loves your soups. If you’re not going to do this anymore, my husband would like to talk to you about buying your recipes.” Gabrielson thought this to be simply a sweet sentiment until May of 2009, when she received a note from Tom Burgess, husband of that customer and the largest commercial real estate developer on the I-88 corridor. He had an idea to help a shelter and wanted to discuss her recipes.

Burgess told her about Hesed House, an extraordinary center in Aurora that serves as a comprehensive resource for homeless people and families. He proposed to buy Gabrielson’s business and donate it to Hesed House. She would continue to be the face of the business at craft fairs, but the staff and guests of Hesed House would assemble and coordinate the distribution of the soup lady products. They met with Ryan Dowd, director of Hesed House, who embraced this opportunity for Hesed House to engage in an entrepreneurial business, and for guests to have hands-on job experience as training and confidence-building before sending out resumes.

Gabrielson realized this was a full-circle moment. She began her business knowing that she’d soon be a single mom and as a way to help pay Christmas bills. Now she was presented with a way to help other moms get back on their feet and to empower them with a sense of ownership in the growth of this business.

The products now known as “Soups Divine” (www.soupsdivine.com) are in their second season of production at Hesed House. The staff and guests at Hesed House show the same pride in quality production as Gabrielson herself. They help with the application process for craft fairs, and assemble, bag, label and pack the products for Gabrielson to pick up and bring to shows. “Now when I’m in the booth, I have this amazing story to tell about the extraordinary work I get to witness at Hesed House,” says Gabrielson.

The Hesed House guests who participate in the everyday business of Soups Divine (www.soupsdivine.com) gain not only work experience, but a sense of purpose, of being needed, and a sense of ownership as part of a team. “I’m a firm believer in the proverb

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‘Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime,’” says Burgess. “What I do every day is change the outcomes for small businesses through ownerships. It’s through ownership that we can change. Hesed House is a giant safety net to help people out. We need to empower and prop people up and change the outcomes of people’s lives.”

Soups Divine currently offers fewer products than Gabrielson’s product line, allowing Hesed House time to master the production process without compromising quality. In the future, Burgess envisions Soups Divine distribution seasonally at specialty shops, then growing to larger availability at grocery chains, perhaps even year round.

“I have such admiration for Tom Burgess and Ryan Dowd,” says Gabrielson. “They both grew up in families where they were taught to give back to the community. On my own, I could never give back to this extent. But now I can walk in with receipts from a craft fair and give it to Hesed House. I could never have done that without divine intervention. The gratitude I have for being given this opportunity is overwhelming.”

About Burgess Commercial Real Estate

For business owners and real estate brokers, Burgess delivers solutions to meet client’s space needs by creative building design and customized ownership or leasing options. Flexibility is a main focus of Burgess’s land development and building design. For more than fifteen years we have been strong, solvent, on time and on budget. We have property available today in the most desirable locations for business. We work with each business’s unique circumstances to make ownership and long-term financial security a reality. Burgess Commercial Real Estate is located at 1585 Beverly Court in Aurora. For more information, call 877-57-BURGESS (Toll free: 877-572-8743) or visit www.burgesscommercial.com ■

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