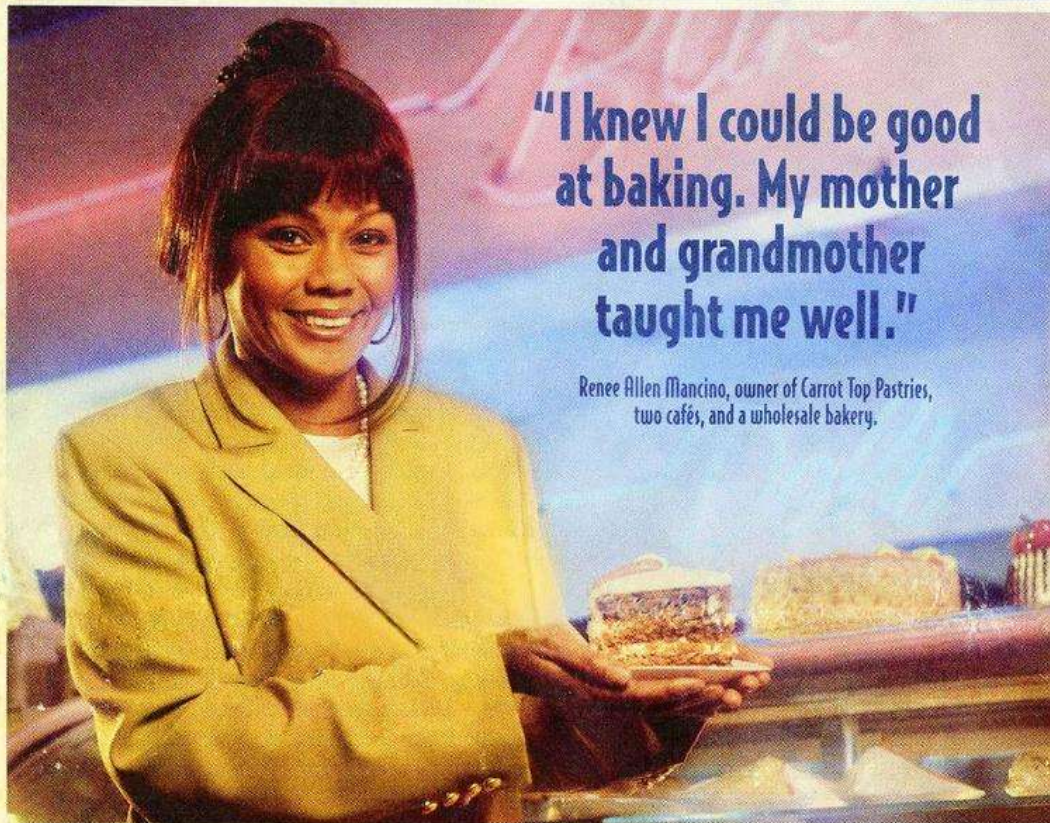


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"I knew I could be good at baking. My mother and grandmother taught me well."

Renee Allen Mancino, owner of Carrot Top Pastries, two cafés, and a wholesale bakery.

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BJ's Salutes Small Businesses

by KELLIE SCHROEDER

If you're like most of us, you've probably daydreamed about it at least once. Why, it's part of the American Dream in a way, isn't it — to become your own boss... to start your own enterprise? But then, for many of us, doubt sets in. Would you really be able to make a go of it, you wonder? Well, BJ's found four innovative Business Members who decided to follow their dreams. Their backgrounds are as varied as the businesses they started, ranging from a jet-setting corporate consultant to a self-taught carrot cake baker. But they all share one thing in common; they are all small business owners who understand firsthand the struggles and rewards of striking out on their own.

BJ's salutes their resolve, resourcefulness, dedication, and determination. These BJ's Members are proof-positive that you can indeed beat the odds to start a successful small business — and have loads of fun doing it!

A PIECE OF CAKE

The folks at *The New York Times* say that BJ's Member Renee Allen Mancino makes "the best carrot cake in the entire world." But the owner of Carrot Top Pastries confesses that she never planned to become a baker.

"I never expected to be so successful with my business," she confides. "In fact, I was going to be a mortician."

It was at her grandmother's funeral that Renee realized her calling: forensic medicine. She packed her bags and moved from her hometown of Cleveland to the Big Apple. There, she fell in love, got married, and had a baby. Everything was proceeding as planned until, at age 26, Renee found herself widowed with a young daughter to support. "That's when I started baking the carrot cakes," Renee recalls.

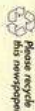
"I baked a cake as a gift for someone in prison. They liked it and asked if they could order, and pay, for more," she says. Using her rent money, Renee headed to the market and trundled

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BJ's Salutes Small Businesses

continued from cover



Setting six-month goals and having a strong belief in her product were just two of Renee Allen Mancino's secrets to her success.

the ingredients back to her apartment in a shopping cart. Then she spent the next six years grating carrots and spreading cream-cheese frosting for 250 customers a week.

On Sundays, she would put away her mixing bowls and pull out her science books, diligently studying for medical school. When Columbia University's Medical School accepted her to their program in 1977, Renee was elated! She baked all summer long to scrape together her tuition.

Then, right before classes started, tragedy struck. The car Renee was riding in was involved in a serious accident. After months of rehabilitation and reconstructive surgery, she finally returned home. "But, I lost my long-term and short-term memory," Renee recalls. "There was no way I could return to school."

Fortunately, she did remember how to make carrot cakes. And before long, she added some of New York's swankiest restaurants and food stores to her customer list.

She also started getting orders from celebrities. "The first celebrity cake I baked was for Richard Pryor," recalls Renee. Stevie Wonder and Archbishop Desmond Tutu fell in love with her confections as well.

Then Renee herself fell in love. In 1980, she married police officer Robert Mancino, who helped her open her very first shop. Since then, Carrot Top Pastries has become a family affair. Daughter Tanyika is a pastry chef, Robert runs the business end, and Renee still keeps her finger in all the pots. Today, Renee oversees a staff of 20 employees at her two cafés and her wholesale bakery in New York City.

TO GROW OR NOT TO GROW

In this age of "virtual retailers," Renee remains cautious about expanding by way of the Web. "I will eventually do mail order," she explains. "I know it would be an instant

success. But I learned years ago that you need to be sure you can supply the demand."

Renee says that one of the secrets to her success is that she set six-month goals along the way. "You have to crawl before you walk," says Renee. "If you grow too fast, you end up losing because you're unable to keep up."

She keeps some ideas simmering on the back burner until the time is right. "I'm planning to work on a cookbook with my daughter," says Renee. "And we're going to open our own cake-decorating school in our uptown bakery."

When she and Robert are sure they're ready, they'll expand into the mail-order business. And don't be surprised if you see Renee join the likes of Emeril and Martha. "I would love to do a show on the Food Network someday," Renee confides.

WEARING TWO HATS

Starting out wasn't easy. Renee had to figure out how to transition from baking for friends to keeping up with a weekly 1,200-cake contract. "I knew I could be good at baking. My mother and grandmother taught me well," Renee says. "But I had to teach myself to do it on a commercial level. There were a lot of stumbling blocks, but I never gave up. I always believed in my product and never changed my recipe."

While wearing a chef's hat was second nature to Renee, wearing the business manager's hat wasn't as simple. Even after two-and-a-half decades in the business, Renee still faces challenges.

"The hardest thing about running my business is managing employees," she confides. "I learned along the way that your employees' problems become your problems."

One day, she stopped to answer the phone as she was rushing to the airport for a long-awaited vacation. It was the fire department. Seems an employee had accidentally

"I wish I could give all entrepreneurs a shot of trusting their own gut. I think that's what helped get me to where I am today."

Linda Novey-White, CEO
of Linda Novey Enterprises

set her new oven on fire.

But none of that overshadows the joy Renee feels when she's at one of her bakeries. "The smell of baking brings back such fond memories of when I was growing up," Renee explains. "And to know that I get to lick the batter if I want,

and I don't even have to fight with any brothers or sisters to do it... now that's the best feeling in the world!"