

# q&a

## Debi Ameline, Owner, The Gift Basket Diva



Debi Ameline was an educator for about 30 years, who always had a knack for arts and crafts. When attending parties or events, she would create gift baskets and eventually developed a following of co-workers who wanted her to create baskets for them. About five years ago, Ameline decided to stop teaching and leap into business ownership. She now creates gift baskets full-time and is developing her image as the South Sound's gift basket diva.

**How did your time as an educator prepare you to be a small business owner? Are there any similarities?**

Listening skills seem to be important in both professions.

When someone calls for a custom basket, I always ask about the recipient. "Tell me about them, tell me what they like", etc. The greatest part of that skill is that the person who receives the basket is amazed at how we put all their favorite things into a basket.

Great planning and organization really help, too.

**When you decided to follow your passion for gift basket making what was the hardest part in the start up process?**

As an educator, one knows little to nothing about being an entrepreneur.

We all enjoy the fun parts of business, the creative parts, but then reality hits and we need to deal with financials, employee issues and paperwork.

The whole business game has to be a learning process.

**As a small business owner, what has been the biggest key to your success?**

Keep it positive. Keep it light. Don't give up – persevere. Treat everyone as you would like to be treated.

**How important is the Internet to your business? Would you have been able to have this type of business without the traffic you get from the Web?**

My website is vital. People often go to the site, check out all the wonderful choices and then order from the site, call direct to our workshop or e-mail.

I've even had orders from Facebook. We check our website, phones, e-mail and social media many times during the day. We're there for everyone.

**How many gift baskets do you make a year? What do they usually cost? Who are your main customers?**

We produce hundreds of gift baskets each year.

The Gift Basket Diva is in its fifth year. Each year's total outshines the previous.

Our custom baskets start at \$35. Our average basket is about \$50 to \$75.

For custom baskets there's no specific person we target – friends, family, business acquaintances – everyone needs a gift and we're here to help.

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For pre-designed baskets, I work with corporations that are using baskets as holiday "thank yous" to their clients and employees. We work with medical and dental offices, lawyers, accountants, and insurance and ad agencies.

We also supply these "special welcome" gifts for premium hotels and B&Bs for their VIP guests.

**Why should people order one of your baskets rather than buying all the parts themselves or maybe just going with a gift card?**

Our clients/customers always comment on the value they receive with a Gift Basket Diva creation.

One recent recipient told my client that her basket "just kept on giving" all kinds of treasures and treats.

I also provide wrap-up service. This is for the people who say, "I can do that myself!" and those who know they don't have the skills or the time to make their gift look fabulous.

I have had quite a few people throw their

products on my worktable and say, "I've been trying to make this look nice for hours – you do it."

We also have created Gift Card Baskets. Using the gift card or cards, some logo materials and our wrap-up service, we can give you that "wow" factor instead of just handing someone a gift card.

**What kinds of baskets are the most popular? Are there any new trends when it comes to gift baskets?**

Some of our most popular baskets are The Coffee Lover's, The Chocolate Lover's and All Kinds of Spa/Pamper.

One of our most trending gifts is the Healthy Chocolate (using Xocai Chocolates) Basket and Chocolate Tower.

Lots of us are into healthy eating (and snacking) and custom baskets are always available with great health foods inside.

**With "auction season" coming up, what advice do you have for businesses that will be putting together baskets to donate to different events?**

Some of my most successful auction buyers call early and order often.

We supply some of the most tremendous baskets, all custom of course, to some of the biggest auctions in the area. One Tacoma auction brags about our showy baskets that ultimately bring in more auction dollars.

**What are the biggest complaints people have about gift baskets? Are there any items you should avoid putting in baskets?**

Often we avoid sending/shipping food. We will deliver food baskets locally, especially our Family Mourning Baskets (families that have experienced a death).

We bring ready-to-eat or easy-to-prepare foods during a time when their minds and hearts aren't into cooking.

**How big can your business get? What are your long-term goals?**

We have dreamed of expansion and we are already busting at the seams for space.

I would love to have the problem of growing and expanding, hiring new people and moving into other areas of the market.

Long-term, we'd like to branch out and have The Diva's Pre-Designed Division be separate from the Custom Basket Division. We're always looking into new and exciting areas. **BE**



Debi Ameline, owner of The Gift Basket Diva, has stocked up on Valentine's Day items.