

# WOMEN IN BUSINESS

BY Linda Margison / PHOTOS BY Martin Boling



Nicole DeGain.



## Nicole DeGain

Owner, Board & Brush Bloomington

Nicole DeGain never thought she would work for herself, but when she had the opportunity to own a Board & Brush Creative Studio franchise in Bloomington, her decision was immediate. "I knew going back to work for somebody else just was not what I wanted to do," she says. "I was comfortable knowing I was going to have a paycheck in the bank, but I was working for someone else's dreams."

With children in grade school, animals to care for, and her husband's work schedule, she realized she needed the option to set her own schedule. But even more, she wanted to pursue her own dreams. "I was working to sustain a life and not to add passion to my life," she says, adding that her 9- and 12-year-olds have been able to watch and actively participate as she makes her dreams a reality with the instructor-led, DIY home décor workshop business at 522 N. Morton St.

DeGain opened her studio during the pandemic and quickly transitioned to creating at-home kits to keep customers safe. "It feels so good knowing that we've added some positivity, some stress relief, some escape," she says about her three-hour workshops. "I didn't realize how much I needed that, too." Follow Board & Brush Bloomington on social media or [boardandbrush.com/bloomington](http://boardandbrush.com/bloomington).



Jaime Sweany. Photo by Lisa Degler



## Jaime Sweany

Owner, Juniper Art Gallery

Jaime Sweany, who established Juniper Art Gallery 18 months before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, says she's proud that the art gallery and gift shop has "weathered the pandemic storm." Located on the quaint and colorful historic courthouse square in Spencer, Indiana, the woman-owned and -operated business was built around themes of community and making the arts accessible to all.

As it becomes safe, Juniper is resuming popular in-person activities. The gallery currently hosts an in-person, socially distanced Fiber Arts Group; a Zoom book club; and livestreamed musical performances. Additionally, both Sweany and sales associate Lisa Degler are fully vaccinated. "The health and safety of our visitors is paramount," Sweany says, adding that Juniper features hand sanitizing stations, a safety shield at the register, contactless credit card processing, and mask requirements "until the CDC advises otherwise."

"The support I receive from my Bloomington community is critical, and I want to express deep gratitude to those who purchase art and gifts in-gallery or online," she says. "A special thanks to those who donated to Friends of Juniper," a fundraiser established by Bill and Glenda Breeden "to ensure the arts remain strong in Owen County."

"I look forward to once again having a packed house for our Art & Music Series, Self-Care Sundays, art demonstrations, and receptions," Sweany says. Visit [juniperartgallery.com](http://juniperartgallery.com).



Kristi Gibbs.



## Kristi Gibbs

Realtor, Century 21 Scheetz

Although Bloomington's current housing market favors sellers, Kristi Gibbs with Century 21 Scheetz says homeowners shouldn't jump in until they've talked with a Realtor who can usher them through the process smoothly. Gibbs connects sellers with contractors to prepare their homes, plans how and when showings will happen around work-from-home schedules, and offers decluttering assistance to make the process as stress-free as possible. "I provide a one-stop shopping experience to make the selling process easier," she says.

With such a hot market, Gibbs explains that buyers also benefit from partnering with a good real estate agent. "Buyers need a Realtor who has good rapport with other agents, crafts a winning offer, and communicates well in order to win," says Gibbs, adding that she also does virtual showings and provides a full-service concierge program for her buyers, which includes making connections for rehab after closing, cleaning services, or unpacking assistance.

Gibbs employs three other people who support clients, answer calls, and handle requests of all sizes. "We have spent years refining our systems so no one ever misses a deadline and clients are never left wondering what's going on," she says, adding that she often helps clients with referrals. "I love passing that knowledge to my clients." For more information, visit [kristigibbsrealty.com](http://kristigibbsrealty.com) or call 812-606-9790.



Cindy Kinnarney.



## Cindy Kinnarney

North Region President, German American Bank

Cindy Kinnarney has advice for her younger self: the only limiting factor in your personal success is you. "Everything is obtainable," says the north region president for German American Bank. "If you set your goals in a certain direction, you should just go for it."

The impetus for Kinnarney's 25-year banking career began when she got out of the Air Force and went to college on the GI Bill. Students had to pay for a semester upfront, and then the GI Bill would reimburse them every month.

"I found a bank that was willing to make me a loan every semester, and then I just paid that loan back whenever I got the GI Bill payments," she says. "That was my first experience with how a bank can help people, and that's certainly what I like to do—help people, the community, our clients, our team. Throughout my career, I have been trying to pay that forward."

Part of doing that has included volunteering on nonprofit boards and community endeavors, like The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, Bloomington

Economic Development Corporation, Downtown Bloomington Inc., and CDFI Friendly Bloomington.

"We all have a responsibility to give back to the community we live in and share our skills and talents to make our community better," Kinnarney says. "I've always been a big believer in service."

Kinnarney also understands the responsibilities that come with being in a leadership position. "If you work hard, good things will come, and if you put in the time and effort, providing good service to your employer and your customers, good things will come—that's always been my experience," she says. "The relationships you build and the bridges you build drive success, no matter who you are."

Having joined German American Bank a year ago, Kinnarney says she loves the team atmosphere and overall culture fostered within the bank. "The organization truly cares about its employees and wants to provide an environment for them to succeed and thrive in their various roles and in new opportunities," she explains.

While her work is an important part of her life, Kinnarney says her family—husband Evan, daughters, Emily and Madeline, and son, Ethan—makes her who she is. "They play a big part in my life and any leadership role," she says. "You've got to put in extra hours and have extra community duties that don't happen from nine to five. You have to have a really strong support system in order to pull that off, and I'm very blessed to have mine." For information about German American Bank, visit [germanamerican.com](http://germanamerican.com).



Margaret Fette.



## Margaret Fette

Owner, The Tailored Fit

Margaret Fette credits a 10-year stint of quilting—starting when she was pregnant and on bedrest—for honing her sewing skills and providing a foundation for her business, The Tailored Fit. “There’s so much in quilting that teaches you to be very precise, but very creative at the same time,” she says while absently pulling out a seam on a pair of pants.

Fette opened her shop 20 years ago after realizing she didn’t want to continue as a costume designer on Broadway. “I really like to sew,” she explains. “I’ve designed quilts, but I found with clothing, I was better at taking someone else’s design and improving upon it. This is my dream job.”

Her love of sewing drives all her decisions at The Tailored Fit, where she offers fabrics from around the world, unique patterns from independent companies, a sewing machine brand she believes in—Bernina—and classes for beginners to experts. “I always wanted to teach sewing in small locations,” she says, adding that she hopes to soon increase her class offerings. “I carry items here that customers can’t get elsewhere. With that, I

am trying to bring everything to the table that will help people be successful. I don’t want someone to be so frustrated they quit.” For information, visit [thetailoredfit.com](http://thetailoredfit.com).



(left) Vivi Szalavari. (right) Shannon Baker.  
Photos by Haley Sinn/Sonder Photography



## Vivi Szalavari & Shannon Baker

Bar Manager, The Uptown Cafe

Assistant Front of House, The Uptown Cafe

When General Manager Galen Cassady looks back on how The Uptown Cafe navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, he sees two people in particular who were instrumental in keeping the restaurant operating smoothly. Bar Manager Vivi Szalavari and Assistant Front of House Shannon Baker brought years of experience and a commitment for success to a difficult year in the service industry.

“They’re really a critical piece of our management team,” says Cassady, explaining that the pandemic hit hard and he has relied heavily on the two managers. “They are role models for others in the workplace. They’re not afraid to roll up their sleeves and get the work done.”

After years in the retail industry, Baker joined the Uptown team in 2018 and quickly moved into management. “I want every guest to leave feeling better than when they arrived,” she says, explaining that at age 14 she started serving tables at That Sandwich Place in Nashville, Indiana. “When I got out of retail, I knew I’d go back to the food industry, because it’s a good fit for me.”

Cassady says Baker has been a tremendous asset as the restaurant’s primary daytime manager. “She’s developed so many really great long-lasting relationships and the guests absolutely love her,” he says. “She’s one of those managers that works hand-in-hand with everyone, which is a big part of what we believe in. She definitely leads by example.”

With a decade of experience in the service industry, Szalavari stepped behind the bar in 2018 while working at Big Woods Bloomington and found her calling. She moved to The Uptown later that year.

“Bartending is a weirdly emotional craft for me, and that’s how I approach the sort of drinks I make,” she says. “The craft spirit world can be intimidating and exclusionary, so I like to make it approachable to our guests who want an insider’s experience. I have a conversation with them, and through that human interaction, I find out what they’re looking for and make a drink very specific to their wants and needs.”

Cassady says that Szalavari has been a natural leader and a vital part of his team. “After a short time away right before the pandemic to pursue a great opportunity in an upscale Chicago restaurant, she came back to town to help us out with some shifts, and we realized she was a great fit to lead our entire bar program,” he says. “Vivi has exceeded our expectations as the leader of our bar. We’re excited to see where she takes it from here.”

For information on The Uptown Cafe, visit [the-uptown.com](http://the-uptown.com).



Elizabeth Thompson.



## Elizabeth Thompson

Owner, Hickory Audiology

An Indiana University-educated doctor of audiology, Elizabeth Thompson has come full circle in her career—beginning in clinical practice, pivoting to a stint in hearing aid manufacturing and development, and now returning with her technical and research experience to open Hickory Audiology. “Hearing health is so essential to your overall health and wellness,” she says. “I’m bringing knowledge gained from working in product development to my local community and putting it into practice.”

Thompson was a chemistry major in college, working in a lab behind pipettes all day long, when a professor pulled her aside and said she should be working with people. Having never considered medicine, Thompson met with an academic advisor who was an audiologist and then switched majors that same week. “It’s really the perfect combination of humanities—of science and helping people,” Thompson says. “At the end of the day, there is an immediate gratification when you are making somebody hear better.”

Motivated by her grandmother’s Alzheimer’s disease diagnosis, Thompson says research has found that hearing impairment is the single largest modifiable risk factor for prevention

of dementia. “If I can help one person address their hearing needs so they can live a healthy, active, aging life and reduce the risk of dementia, then my job is fulfilled.” For information, visit [hickoryaudiology.com](http://hickoryaudiology.com) or call 812-668-2056.



Nancy Bakewell.



## Nancy Bakewell

Administrator & Chief Nursing Officer,  
Monroe Hospital

When Nancy Bakewell thinks back on the year of the pandemic, she simply says, “It definitely has been a challenging year.” As administrator and chief nursing officer at Monroe Hospital, with a background in critical care and emergency medicine, Bakewell started her pandemic response in December 2019.

“I’m very familiar with emergency management, pandemic surges of patients, and so forth,” she says, explaining that despite the hospital being well prepared, the patients and staff were frightened, for their own health as well as their families’. “We had to take a twofold approach, not only making sure we maintained the highest level of care for our patients and their families, but also taking care of our team, our staff, and our providers. We care about them as much as we care about our patients.”

Working for 47 years as a nurse, from California to Florida to Bloomington, Bakewell’s position as administrator meant she was also incident commander in the emergency operations center during the pandemic. Since March 13, 2020, she and the director of nurses have been responsible every day, holiday, and weekend to visit the hospital and evaluate its readiness. That includes tracking the number of patients and the amount of supplies and medications available.

Tom Whitehead, Monroe Hospital’s director for marketing and business development, says Bakewell’s actions throughout the pandemic are characteristic of her dedication to the patients and staff, as well as the small hospital’s relationship with the community. “From our leadership team all the way down, we are a team,” he says. “Because we are smaller, we have the ability to be a boutique hospital that knows your name. You are not a number. That’s the characteristic of Monroe Hospital.”

Bakewell attributes part of her servant leadership as being the eighth child of 12 growing up. “My training as a child is responsible for how I handle pressure and how I handle disagreements in the workforce,” she says. “I think back to my parents who were very strong leaders and hard workers, and that’s really who made me what I am today.”

With the work she does, the people she supervises, and the city in which she lives, Bakewell is happy she took the position four years ago. “We loved Bloomington on first sight and fell in love with the hospital,” she says. “I’ve been in very large organizations, but I love being in a community hospital where you see the people you take care of every day on the streets, in the supermarket, at restaurants—I really like being part of that community.” For information, visit [monroehospital.com](http://monroehospital.com).