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Finding the right mix

Jennifer Sherrill and Mary Kathryn Reese came up with a winning combination of interests and experience

Dallas Business Journal - by [Christine Perez](#) Staff Writer

Jennifer Sherrill and Mary Kathryn Reese spent more than 15 years at major consulting agencies helping big-league companies such as American Airlines and Compaq refine their business processes.

But in February 2004, the women, who had worked at PricewaterhouseCoopers and then Deloitte Consulting, decided to apply their knowledge to projects a little closer to home -- literally -- by launching **Kitchen Design Concepts**, a kitchen design and remodeling company.

With the advent of offshoring, the consulting world was changing, Reese said. And as parents of young children, the two also were looking for more balance in their lives.

"We wanted to have a service company that would allow us to combine our deep personal interests and leverage our background in process re-engineering," Reese said.

Reese is a culinary aficionado and has been a guest chef at area restaurants. Sherrill has loved construction ever since helping her dad with a home-remodeling project at the age of 3.

After pulling together a business plan, the partners decided to buy an existing company called Kitchen Design Centers in February 2004. With projects already in the pipeline, the duo concentrated on operations.

"We addressed different parts of the business as it made sense, focusing on checks and balances relative to fiscals, governance, communication, customer service, bidding projects and tracking actuals," Reese said. "Jennifer and I both have merger and acquisition experience, so we knew the importance of taking the time to step back and look at improving processes."

The duo developed a lifestyle questionnaire that helps them understand how clients are going to use their kitchens. Once the plans are set, clients get detailed project reports that explain every step of the process and eliminate surprises.

They also get a kitchen care package stocked with goodies and tips for setting up temporary kitchens while their real one is getting torn up.

In-house, the partners use the same robust software they used at Deloitte to manage operations.

Generating referrals

"The tools we used in consulting are as applicable in a small service company as they are in large multimillion-dollar corporations," Sherrill said. "Our customers are just as happy with the processes as they are with the end result. It has helped generate a lot of referrals."

Mike Baker, director at a local software development firm, first asked Sherrill and Reese to remodel the kitchen in his home near Northwest Highway in North Dallas. He ended up hiring them to do other rooms as well.

"They're basically two weeks away from finishing a complete remodel of the entire house," he said. "I've been most satisfied with two things. First is the amount of communication, which is extremely helpful as I travel a lot, and second is their responsiveness to any issues. The quality of their work has been everything I expected it to be."

Extending repertoire

Looking forward, Sherrill and Reese plan to add outdoor kitchens and indoor kitchenettes to their repertoire. They're also hoping to incorporate more "green" features, such as recycled glass tile and engineered wood products into some of their designs.

Kitchen Design Concepts did about 25 projects last year and plans to do around 30 this year, with the average job generating revenue of about \$62,000. Annual revenue for 2006 is projected at \$2 million.

"We'll probably peak at about \$6 million," Sherrill said. "We've already done the fast-paced, high-dollar thing. That's not what we're after anymore."

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Jake Dean

REALLY COOKING:
For remodeling entrepreneurs Jennifer Sherrill, left, and Mary Kathryn Reese, a woman's place is in the kitchen.

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