

Cougar-owned businesses receive boost from WSUAA

Allison Helfen ('89 Hotel and Restaurant Administration), co-owner of Renton's The Wine Alley with husband Scott, knows firsthand the benefit of customer loyalty. Her three-year-old business, a boutique wine shop well-known for its tastings, is successful thanks to a growing base of extremely loyal customers which includes many WSU graduates. When offered the chance to become one of the first members of the new Cougar Business Network, an online searchable database of Cougar-owned or managed businesses offered by the WSU Alumni Association, she didn't hesitate.

"Cougars are very loyal. Once a Cougar finds out that a business is owned by another Cougar... word spreads," she says. Beyond reaching potential customers, Helfen sees the CBN and WSUAA Online Career Support as a tool that could help her locate potential vendors, suppliers, even future hires.

"We launched the Cougar Business Network to facilitate 'Cougars doing business with Cougars'," says WSU AA Executive Director Tim Pavish. "It's an important component of the WSUAA's new Career Support benefit. This database will allow alumni, students, recent graduates, and friends of WSU to search out Cougar-owned or managed businesses. It provides valuable exposure to the Cougar owned-businesses and we hope it will help to enhance their business success."

For Helfen, membership in the WSU Alumni Association—and in the Cougar Business Network—is natural. "We are successful because of my WSU degree," she says. "In the hospitality program, not only did I receive a great business education, I learned how to be hospitable. We welcome customers into our store like it's our home. We make it our business to know them personally. When I pick a wine for them, I want to know how they liked it. Our customers love that we know their names."

The WSU Career Support Suite is located online at www.alumni.wsu.edu/careersupport. Members of the WSU Alumni Association who clearly own a business, or are the principle executive(s) in a leadership role may list their business by registering online: www.alumni.wsu.edu/CBNregistration.

Wine enthusiasts can visit The Wine Alley at www.thewinealley.com or 14276 SE 176th Street in Renton. Card-carrying members of the WSU Alumni Association receive 15% off.