

From the The Business Journal

# Company capitalizes on clean: Strategies for Small Business

## Post-construction projects keep Brookfield firm on growth sweep



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If you ask [Mary Kons](#) why she got into the cleaning business, she will simply tell you “I’ve always liked to clean.”

Kons, 58, owner of Beautiful Cleaning, spent many years working in sales, but decided in 1989 that she would capitalize on her ability to make things sparkle.

Kons worked out of her home for the first four years she was in business. The next 10 years she had an office in Mequon and for the past decade has been based in Brookfield.

Over the years, her business has grown to a \$2 million-plus a year, 80-employee operation that specializes in commercial contract, post-construction and high-end residential cleaning.

Revenue for 2012 hit \$2.3 million and Kons said she expects to reach \$3 million for 2013.

The growth is a result of an upswing in Beautiful Cleaning’s post-construction cleaning contracts.

Kons said during the last few years, some of her commercial clients reviewed their budgets and decided to reduce services.

However, her post-construction cleaning division exceeded expectations during that same time period and made up for those losses.

In the past three years, Kons’ revenue from her post construction clean-up division has jumped from \$50,000 annually to \$500,000.

“I’m really focused on commercial contracts this year and I am counting on post-construction continuing to grow because we are seeing a trend of more projects going up,” she said.

In 2013, Kons said her commercial business is bouncing back and she is in the midst of securing a couple of large contracts.

Kons wouldn’t identify the commercial contracts, one in the manufacturing industry and one a school district.

“When you walk into a building and everything is clean, you might not consciously realize it, but it is supporting you,” Kons said.

[Dave Moore](#), president of Moore Designs Inc., West Bend, contracts with Beautiful Cleaning to do the final clean-up for the new homes he builds or renovates.

The past couple of years have been record years for the West Bend custom home builder and general contractor and Kons' company has reaped the rewards.

"They bring what is needed, all hands on deck," Moore said.

Moore said he contracts with Beautiful Cleaning because of the consistency in the company's work, the attention to detail and the solid supervision and communication during a job.

[Jeff Karron](#), a residential client, had the same observations despite being a smaller client.

"I think that is why she (Kons) is so successful, she is so engaged and so on top of what is going on and she treats small customers the same as she treats the larger ones," Karron said.

Karron said he and his wife use Beautiful Cleaning weekly for their Milwaukee suburban home. They also contracted with the company to clean their current home after a major renovation project and their former home to get it ready to be put up for sale.

"When we put our house on the market it was just as the housing market was declining and we wanted a competitive advantage (and) they helped make it spotless," Karron said.

### **Longtime employees**

Kons refers to her business as a boutique cleaning service with a wide range of offerings, from traditional cleaning services to floor work, carpet cleaning, pressure washing and grounds maintenance services.

"We are geared toward clients who are really interested in a high level of detail," Kons said.

Most of the company's contracts are in Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, Waukesha and Kenosha counties and Kons said contractors have often sent her crews to Madison and Chicago.

The company's employee turnover is very low. Kons said she pays higher than most cleaning services because she doesn't believe anyone can live on minimum wage and has little turnover. Some of her workers have been with her for 18 years.

"I have very deep respect for my employees," she said. "I wouldn't be able to function without them." Lessons

Learned:

What are you most proud of? "I am most proud of creating a successful business that allows me the freedom for foreign travel, purposeful endeavors and self education in my life. My business has supported my three children through higher education at amazing schools and programs in this country." What is the best advice you can give other small biz owners? "Walk with your fear hand in hand and it becomes your friend and just do not stop. Keep moving forward no matter what and do not latch on catchphrases like 'it is a poor economy.' Sometimes you just have to stop listening to the media and know if you put forth energy you will receive and be gifted back."

What is the best business decision you ever made? "To deeply understand and decide I have an important business that contributes to the greater whole and the deep knowing of the privilege to beautify the world through our service."

What is the worst business decision you ever made? "To attempt to take on contracts that are very low bid. It stresses and dilutes all aspects of respect in relation to service and people."

What gives you most satisfaction? "The most satisfaction in my business is to watch my staff change and grow whether it be seeing them in a new car or just smiling more because they have earned enough money to improve their lifestyle and support to their families."

Wendy Strong is The Business Journal's multi-media reporter. You can see her nightly on Fox 6 Milwaukee.