



Tamea Franco Woodward

David Perry

Going back to her earthy roots >

Executive Summary:

From jewelry and watches to anodized aluminum, Tamea Franco Woodward continues to polish her business for success.

By David Perry

"I'm an old earth mama," says Tamea Franco Woodward of Roanoke-based EastWest DyeCom, Inc.

Right. And how does an "old earth mama" become president/CEO and operations manager of a custom metal finishing company?

It makes perfect sense to Woodward. "I'm always fixing something or making something look better. That's the gift I've been given," she says. Her mechanical knack led Woodward to attend the Joseph Bulova School of Watchmaking in New York.

"When I got into watch making, it was a dying trade. I was still in the romantic age," she says.

Her first job was working at her uncle's jewelry store in West Virginia, and an opening for a watch maker at Henebrey's Jewelers at Valley View Mall brought her to Roanoke. But she was yet to discover her true calling.

Woodward was taking a class in metalworking in Gatlinburg, Tenn., when she discovered anodized aluminum. Maybe it was Woodward's previous experience with jewelry plating, but something about that material and her clicked. "I thought, 'I've found my calling,'" she says.

Later, when a position at another jeweler in town began to sour, she had an epiphany about her future in aluminum finishing. "I needed to commit to this or not do it," said Woodward. She took the plunge and started her company in her home. "All I had was \$1,300. It wasn't three months after I started EastWest DyeCom that I realized 'I'm sinking. I can't do this.'"

Undaunted, Woodward took part-time jobs, including a stint pumping gas, to stay afloat while she built her fledgling business.

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

She was working on a lathe at the John C. Nordt plant in Roanoke when a big order came in at EastWest DyeCom. She decided to focus exclusively on her dream and never looked back.

The early going was rough. A pair of Virginia Tech MBA candidates used her business for a case study. "They said, 'You're going to go broke,'" said Woodward. "But I'd never know if I don't try it."

Sometimes, she didn't know her own capabilities. "ITT came over during the first gulf war with this big casting and said, 'We hear you anodize aluminum, can you do this?'" says Woodward. "I said I can't do it, I don't have the thickness testers, I don't have the controls on my tank, I've never done it."

"And they said, 'Can you just put an insulated surface on it?' and I said, 'Oh yeah, I can do that!'"

Other rookie mistakes included purchasing 3,000 pounds of aluminum for a great price—"I couldn't get rid of it. I hadn't developed the market enough," says Woodward—and offering customers too many options. A marketing consultant reviewed Woodward's business model, and "in 30 minutes I changed the whole direction of the company," says Woodward. "I went from a \$50 minimum to a \$250 minimum. I went from 5,000 products to 31. From 30 colors to 13."

In Brief

Name: Tamea Franco Woodward
Age: 50
Company: EastWest DyeCom, Inc.
Location: Roanoke
Type of Business: Customized metal finisher specializing in aluminum
Title: President / CEO and Operations Manager
Background: An army brat born in Georgia, but home is wherever mom is. Attended trade school in New York, then worked as a watchmaker and jeweler. Started EastWest DyeCom in her home in 1987.

Fast forward to 2008. Now that the company is successful, working for a mix of metal artists and industry, what's next for the "old earth mama?" Veggies.

In January, she attended a "detox" center in Texas, where she fasted and ate organic, raw vegetables for two weeks to cleanse body, mind and soul. And next year, she plans to attend a raw food culinary school in California.

"When I got out of watch making school, my big investment was a Troy-Bilt tiller," says Woodward. "I'm going back to those roots." 🌱

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