

Blakely designs go beyond the look

By **Eli Sherman** - January 19, 2018 3:58 am



ALTERNATIVE PATH: Janelle Blakely Photopoulos, owner of Blakely Interior Design in North Kingstown, started the company to indulge her hobby of home design and décor after losing enthusiasm for her former job at a large corporation. / PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

After working several years for a large corporation, Janelle Blakely Photopoulos started losing interest in her job.

The company was bought out and the excitement she once felt for the position diminished.

Around the same time, Photopoulos became pregnant with her first child, and decided to start exploring her hobby of home design and décor.

"I kept hearing that people would pay for this," she said.

After enough encouragement, Photopoulos started Blakely Interior Design in North Kingstown. Despite already holding a degree from Syracuse University, Photopoulos

decided to enroll at the Rhode Island School of Design to get her credentials.

“The process was very long because I now have three children,” she said. “But while I was doing that, I was also growing my business, which took off way faster than I expected.”

Photopoulos started the business in 2010 in her home. But she quickly outgrew her space and moved into The Hive RI, a co-working space in North Kingstown.

Today, Blakely Interior Design is located at The Mill at Lafayette, not far from where she first started at The Hive RI. Photopoulos says about 80 percent of her clients are residential and 20 percent are commercial. Her projects are predominately south of East Greenwich, but she has accepted jobs in the Providence area and Massachusetts.

Photopoulos says it's easy for people to think of interior design as just making space beautiful, but it's become much more to her.

“I've seen the impact that it has on people's lives,” she said.

In addition to growing from one employee – herself – to four full-time employees, Photopoulos recently participated in the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program at the Community College of Rhode Island.

The boot camp-like professional-development program was a lot of work, she quipped, but valuable because of the wealth of knowledge she obtained through the program, and from the other business owners who participated.

“It took it to a whole new level,” Photopoulos said.

As part of completing the program, sponsored by the financial giant Goldman Sachs, and offered to revenue-generating business owners for free, graduates are required to periodically report revenue growth.

Photopoulos declined to disclose sales numbers, but a 10KSB press release noted strong revenue growth only six months after graduating.

"This fall was really crazy, as our projects all culminated at once," she said. "They have all kind of finished in the last week, so we can finally breathe."

Photopoulos plans to add an employee or two this year, and is looking to capture a greater share of the vacation-homes market. She'd also like to start working with builders and architects in the earlier stages of new construction projects.

In all, she's optimistic about the future.

"As interior designers, we think we do great design," she said. "In the design world, and this is true for art, people tend to gravitate toward your work because it's a very personal thing."

OWNER: Janelle Blakely Photopoulos

TYPE OF BUSINESS: Interior designer

LOCATION: 650 Ten Rod Road, North Kingstown

EMPLOYEES: Four

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 2010

ANNUAL SALES: WND