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## Bek Gerstner, Tennille Skelly among successful businesswomen making a difference in Goulburn

Whether they're florists, grocery owners or pest controllers, these women play a big role in looking after the community, especially during these tough times.

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Experiencing a fair share of lockdowns, as well as other Covid-19 restrictions, is a surefire way of realising what services play an essential and valuable role in our lives. Particularly in smaller regional towns like Goulburn where resources may be limited, it's important to identify those that are working hard to look after their community by keeping people healthy, protected and connected.

Here are some of the talented business women in Goulburn that are doing their bit for the community.

### REBECCA GERSTNER

#### Beks Bloomz



Florist Rebecca Gerstner makes sure the region is blooming.

When Bek Gerstner moved from Sydney to Goulburn, her flower business began from her garage and kitchen table. Then, as she built a name for herself she opened a shop which has evolved from a dedicated wedding florist, to a florist for all occasions.

Last year, Ms Gerstner won Canberra's Bride's Choice Awards at a time when the industry was heavily impacted by Covid and in-person weddings became internet weddings.

"Although I scaled down on events, I got involved in the Canberra wedding fare, where there were runways and designers, to try to inspire and keep our couples feeling excited, as their mindset could change to unbothered during Covid," Ms Gerstner said.

For the Covid weddings, she made sure to really communicate with her clients to ensure that they made the most of the situation.

"I tried not to take the special moment away from the clients, and focus on the couple and the few family members that were celebrating with them. The flowers were still an important part of their wedding and photographs were still shared with loved ones," she said.

Currently, her weddings have been cancelled or rescheduled again, but Ms Gerstner is doing contactless flower deliveries, as well as care hampers and gifts, to continue connecting families and friends and just brightening up the community.

"It's all about milestones. How many people in their nineties can't see their families, and are celebrating birthdays alone? We are essentially delivering emotion," she said.

She is currently a finalist for the 2021 Canberra Bride Awards and is also starting to deliver hampers with dried flowers nationally and will be taking her usual Christmas wreaths workshops online this year.

"Besides creating my own brand, I wanted to create my own community in a way that everyone could relax, create and connect in my workshop space upstairs," Ms Gerstner said.

**TENNILLE SKELLY**

**Dream Admin Services**



Dream Admin Services founder Tennille Skelly.

Founder and CEO of Dream Admin Services, Tennille Skelly, had always wanted to start her own business, so when the opportunity revealed itself she went for it.

“I found myself without work overnight, and I had a young family and didn’t really want to commute to Canberra on a daily basis which I had done for a number of years, and going out on my own and starting a company had always been a dream - hence the name - so I thought it’s now or never,” Ms Skelly said.

Since 2018, she has grown the team to 10 local women who provide virtual receptionist services, bookkeeping and financial, admin and secretarial support.

“I’ve always had a soft spot for women re-entering the workforce after having children, being a working mum myself, and I know how difficult it is,” she said.

And now, they not only have clients all over Australia, but also in the US and Philippines, which Ms Skelly credits to the unique and vast skill sets the company offers.

“There was no other business like Dream Admin at the time nationally - yes there’s a lot of independent bookkeepers, receptionists, but we combined all those together and are literally a full outsourced office,” she said.

Due to the remote nature of Dream Admin and its use of high-level technology, Covid highlighted and grew the business significantly by 45 per cent since the beginning of the pandemic.

“It’s all online - we’re able to answer telephone calls for all our clients, and all of their work comes through our office here in Goulburn,” she said.

Though outside of lockdown, local clients in the Tablelands region have the additional value of being able to visit the office if they’d like.

In providing a suite of business solutions, she is able to fulfill her passion of supporting small businesses.

“I love helping small businesses flourish by giving them access to my personnel that they otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford,” Ms Skelly said.

“Majority of our clients are on fixed weekly retainers, which is good for budgeting. And it’s good value for money because they don’t get access to just one staff member, but 11.

“I have a soft spot for the trades industry, because I believe they welcome our support the most, but I also just love supporting local women and it’s something that keeps driving me - that I’ve got a powerhouse of a team and together we create something pretty incredible.”

Ms Skelly also recently opened a subsidiary of Dream Admin called Pink Door Solutions, which provides debt collection services.



## KYM BENNETT

### P Off Pest



Kym Bennett started her business during the pandemic and has no regrets.

Some would say starting a business during a pandemic is a pretty bold move, but for Kym Bennett, it was the right time.

“Pests don’t really know we’re in a pandemic and didn’t get the memo about a lockdown, so as long as there’s pests, there’s work,” she said.

She and her husband found there to be a hole in the market for pest controllers in Goulburn, having experienced issues with pests themselves.

“We needed a pest controller and a few that we called never showed up, or the ones that did, never really solved our pest problems because they didn’t listen or seem interested. We then talked to some friends about it who were having the same issues, so we thought that there’s a need for this in the area,” Ms Bennett said.

Having chosen a non-traditional industry for a woman, the savvy businesswoman said she received a prejudiced remark here or there.

“Going out on jobs, especially by myself, I get the judgemental look or the comments saying ‘Do you want me to help you?’ ‘Are you sure you can do this yourself?’ and I’ve even had guys say to me ‘Oh where’s your husband?’ or ‘Oh it’s you’”

However Ms Bennett brushes it off and just focuses on doing her job, noting that as word spreads about her business, people are starting to become more accepting.

She also believes having an equal playing field in her trade is more beneficial to the community.

“Women just bring something else to that trade business, I’ve had people comment that I pay more attention to the details, listen to what the customer actually wants and needs, rather than just try to solve the problem,” she said.

Ms Bennett also gave some tips on how people can reduce rodents in their homes, which she provides regularly on the P Off Pest Facebook page.

“Limit food sources, making sure that pet food is sealed in containers and that no scraps are left out,” she said.

“Bird seed is a big attractant to mice, so if you have any chickens, just keep their food covered up. Limit water around the place, make sure your garden is clean and that holes are sealed up around your house, especially under your kitchen sink where the dishwasher hoses are and under entries into the home.”

## **DANIELLE GHOSN**

### **Goulburn Organics**



Danielle Ghosn, Owner of Goulburn Organics, holding a box full of fresh veggies.

After moving from Sydney to a truffle farm just outside of Goulburn, Danielle Ghosn and her husband started a local cooperative/small buying group, which expanded into a retail business focusing on organic produce from local suppliers to Goulburn residents.

“We wanted to complement our truffle farming and really support our community by making organic food more affordable and accessible,” Ms Ghosn said.

In keeping business costs lower and getting customers to eat seasonally, she said she was then able to offer reduced retail pricing to people. Some of the seasonal produce for Spring include capsicums, cucumbers, kiwis and berries.

There is also a demand for organic food, which Ms Ghosn said she noticed after coming to Goulburn as a weekender for 20 years and living in the area for seven years.

“I’ve really noticed a big shift probably over the last five years towards more and more people wanting to eat healthier and look after themselves. There’s a lot more awareness about issues with roundup and how chemical usage in our farming systems can affect us,” she said.

Ms Ghosn’s passion for organic produce first started when her lifelong struggle with eczema worsened after she had kids.

“It spread on my hands and it was constantly cracked fingers and just awful,” she said.

“When you become a mum, things shift and you start becoming more aware of things, and having a research background myself as a marine biologist, I just started getting into natural remedies to try and overcome my eczema. I then came to learn that I had a wheat allergy, which was causing a lot of it, and that started my journey into eating healthier and becoming more aware of what was going into my body, and was potentially worsening my condition.”

## **JANELLE BROWN**

### **Personnel Group**



Janelle Brown, Goulburn area manager Personnel Group.

Janelle Brown is the Goulburn area manager for The Personnel Group - Australia's first regionally-based disability service provider - which was voted Best Community Service Business in the Goulburn Chamber of Commerce 2020 Business 2580 Awards.

"You have people with barriers that are seeing you at their lowest point, and that's where we work closely with them to link in the allied health services to see them move forward and ultimately upskill and train into employment. And when that's the outcome, you know you've made a difference in their lives," Ms Brown said.

"Especially with Covid, we made sure to reach out to our participants to see that they are still okay. We didn't want them to think that just because all these things were happening, that we didn't care. I just made sure that our participants from Goulburn were provided with the support that they so deserve.

Some of the common groups of people Personnel Group help include families that relocate from another area to be closer to their family member in the Goulburn correctional facility, homeless people, whether that's those living on the streets or couchsurfing, and young people.

"With youth and the pressures of today's society, they do experience a lot of mental health problems, and that's why we have a very active working relationship with Headspace. We work with local youth to link them back into the education side of things or find some employment for them and assist them in managing their health and wellbeing," she said.

Personnel Group is a free service.

"We're here to help, it's just a matter of reaching out," she said.