

# UPSIZE BUSINESS BUILDER AWARDS

The Upsize Business Builder Awards, presented by Winthrop & Weinstine, is an annual contest designed to recognize Minnesota entrepreneurs for driving smart, sustainable growth.

From nominations, Upsize selected five finalists: Avionte, Imagine IT, Renters Warehouse, TitleSmart and VirtualOffiCenters.

Their CEOs presented their stories in a private session in November, after which judges named Kevin Ortner of Renters Warehouse the Upsize Business Builder of the Year.

Upsize is proud to present all five impressive entrepreneurs in these pages, in hopes that every business owner will draw wisdom and inspiration from their tales.



## Targeting workers based at home pays for VirtualOffiCenters

**VIRTUALOFFICENTERS** has been around for 33 years, but the last couple have been the most exciting for owner Lori Spiess.

That's when she started targeting self-employed people to use her five centers around the Twin Cities, remodeling them to offer co-working and team spaces as well as meeting options for an "on-demand client base."

Starting with 37 such clients in 2011, when she re-branded her firm to attract this market, she's grown to 500 "virtual" clients and a total client base above 800. "I didn't want to sell bricks and mortar," Spiess says. "I wanted to

sell a community." The changes were necessary as the need for office space changed, too. Back in the day: "I had one guy sitting in one office, and when he left I got another guy. I had a waiting list. I'd say in a smug little way, we're recession proof."

But then came the rise of the part-time office user, the type her firm once thought of as "those poor people who worked at home." But then everything changed. "My goodness, the fax machine wasn't bringing in \$5,000 a month in revenue," any more. "How was I going to re-tool my business? I didn't have a clue what to try."

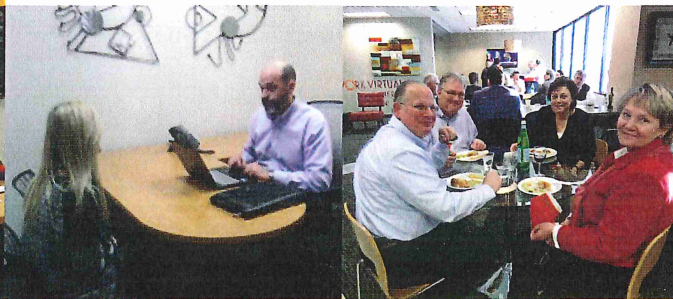
So she started to talk to people, asking them what they liked about working at home, and what they didn't like. Invariably the latter answer was "isolation," and so her new business idea was born.

"We're going through our biggest growth patch. People come out of their homes to come into our centers to

### Meetings



### Workspaces



### Networking



### Offices

### Collaboration



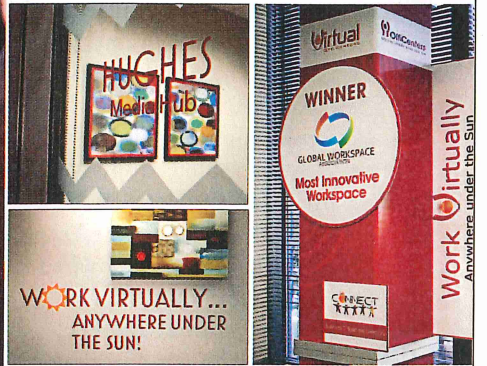
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and friends for making  
every day awesome

life is short.  
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**Lori Spiess**, CEO of VirtualOffiCenters, calls this year her “proudest” year of growth after 33 years in business, because of the community she’s building for solo and home-based entrepreneurs. Recovering from cancer, she wants to hit work hard. “The bucket list can wait. I want to get back to work.”

work with other people,” she says.

“This has been my proudest year,” Spiess says, even though she won’t hit her overall number. In May she was diagnosed with head and neck cancer, and spent the summer in radiation and chemotherapy. Some of the marketing events she had planned had to be postponed, hence the company fell a bit short of projections.

Now she says she’s healthy and ready for more. “When it comes to big life events, some say work less. I say work more,” she says. “The bucket list can wait. I want to get back to work.”

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