

Woodbury

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Owner Lori Spiess's leadership sets her office spaces apart from the rest. Lori Spiess recently opened a Woodbury branch of her coworking offices.

Photo by: Tate Carlson

Lori Spiess is finally getting a workspace near home. "For all these years, I've been commuting to work from my home in St. Paul," she says; that is, commuting to any of the five (the Woodbury location is number six) OffiCenters locations in the metro area that she's owned and operated for over 35 years. Speaking with Spiess—who is open and energetic and quick to laugh—you sometimes forget she's the boss and find yourself wanting to simply chat with her about what 35-plus years in business have taught her. She seems happy to oblige. "It starts with me," she says. "I'm a member of this coworking community."

It was quite a different community when she started OffiCenters in 1981. "We called it 'executive suites' or 'shared offices.' We'd have 35 or 40 offices, and there

was usually one guy in every office ... If somebody left, we'd find another guy to take the office. That's how it was," she says. Now their membership is about 50 percent female, and 20 of 21 of Spiess's employees—who do everything from day-to-day management of each space to answering the phones to scheduling shared conference rooms—are women. Her business grew organically, she says, with decisions to add centers and remodel older ones along the way. "I took a lot of chances, and they have really paid off for me," she says. "I try to tell people, 'Go out there and take some risks.'"

For the Woodbury location, she decided to use a different type of property and offer a better price point. Her decision was influenced by what's best for her clients. "Can I make buildings [like the Woodbury location] work long-term in order to give my members a better price point?" she asks. Once people join Woodbury, she says, they enjoy all the benefits of OffiCenters, including the \$89 per month coworking rate, which Spiess says is the best deal in town. In Woodbury, however, private office rental will cost significantly less than at other locations. With an easy, off-the-freeway location, plentiful parking, 60 coworking seats (including some very comfy-looking booths), 40 private offices, two big team spaces, a training room, meeting and conference rooms, a podcast room, great WiFi and coffee, the Woodbury branch is an attractive addition to the OffiCenters family.

Spiess says people who cowork (as opposed to working at home) report not only decreased isolation but an increase in creativity, too. She notes that 78 percent of members who have joined OffiCenters have increased revenue and sales. Some of this improvement in the bottom line clearly comes through the influence of Spiess herself, whose passion for people and their businesses is evident. She encourages her clients "to try to buy from one another first" and to collaborate on projects. Clients can get to know her and each other at any number of social and educational events happening weekly at each center.

Cathy Paper has been a coworker at OffiCenters for eight years. Like Spiess, she lives in St. Paul and has been looking forward to an eastside location. As her business models for her marketing and promotion business RockPaperStar have evolved, she has utilized both the coworking space at OffiCenters and a private office space. Another OffiCenters option she takes advantage of is the administrative support, which can include setting up meetings, signing up for events or even doing research. "OffiCenters has been very stabilizing for me," she says. "The people there are my team. Lori does a good job of building a nest for everyone."

