

SECOND CAREER A WINNER FOR JEANNIE RIDDLES

After more than three decades managing on-site foodservice for hospitals, corporate dining and upscale retirement facilities, Jeannie Riddles figured she was ready to rest. With her husband Douglass, she left the congestion of Atlanta and retired to St. Augustine, Florida, where she'd first worked in hospital foodservice. A few months later, boredom set in. Riddle approached Melvin McQuaig, owner of St. John's Foodservice, about a position and he found one for her – as a rookie DSR charged with developing a territory from scratch.

"Melvin was my DSR at my first hospital job in St. Augustine 35 years ago -- before he bought the company," she says. "He gave me the opportunity to do sales, rode with me and helped me get started. I knew the products and what to suggest, I just had to get over the nervousness of walking in as a sales person. That was 11 years ago and I only wish I'd found this career earlier."

Riddles has built her territory into a \$2.5 million one for St. John's, a small broadliner with total annual sales of \$8 million and a product line that numbers 2,500 SKUs. Being so small in a market dominated by large national and super-regional competitors can be tough, she says, but both she and St. John's use their ability to out-service the big guys as a calling card.

"Our product line isn't big, but we bring a lot of things in strictly for certain customers," she says. "A local hospital, for instance, where we used to do zero is now a \$4,000-a-week account because we were able to supply pre-wrapped bakery items that the big guys wouldn't or couldn't bring in. It's grown from there. I always try to find out what a customer is having trouble finding and go to work to bring it in for them."

St. John's also offers both morning and afternoon deliveries, which small operators with limited storage space appreciate, and is flexible to respond quickly to emergencies. Riddles checks her phone by 6 a.m. every day for last-minute orders, for instance. "Customers know that if something's come up or they forgot to include something on their order, they can call me by 6 a.m. and they'll have it by 9:30. If they miss that cut-off, I'll personally pick it up and deliver it to them. That's the beauty of working with a small company in a small city."

Beyond service, she also draws on her operator experience to consult on product choices, menu development and profitability. "That's been my biggest asset as a sales person," she says. "I can sit down with customers and cost out recipes, suggest menu prices and recommend products that let them maintain quality but also manage food and labor costs. They appreciate that kind of help."

While her account base is diverse, Riddles says she's most proud of the work she's done with hotels. Prior to her joining, St. John's did no business in the segment but she's built it up to be a strong suite. The company now services some 40 hotel properties in St. Augustine, and, through Riddles' work with its buyers, offers a broad line of products that meet their needs.

At age 62, she says she's not planning a second try at retirement any time soon. "I learned the first time around that I need to stay busy and be around people. I'm still excited about what I'm doing and having a great time, so I plan to stick around."



Jeannie Riddles
St. John's Foodservice
St. Augustine, FL

DSR of the Month

Continued Next Page

Years as a DSR	11 years
Annual sales volume	\$2.5 million
No. of active accounts	80
Type of accounts	Independent restaurants, caterers, hospitals, schools, hotels, B&Bs
Territory	City of St. Augustine
Items carried	2,500 + special orders
Biggest attributes	Foodservice experience, product knowledge
Tries to always do	Track rebate items, give advance notice of price changes, return every call asap
Tries to never do	Over-promise and under-deliver
Learned the hard way	Don't get behind on collections!
Best thing about being a DSR	Having customers who become like family
Worst thing about being a DSR	Trying to solve unanticipated problems while keeping all of your balls in the air at the same time
Heroes:	Husband, Douglass, for supporting my choice to launch a second career
Mojo Motto	Knowledge is power, but enthusiasm pulls the switch

