

# **Entrepreneur of the Month**

## **Jadyne Reichner, Co-Owner, Purple Haze Lavender**

<b>Home:</b>	Sequim, Washington
<b>Age:</b>	47
<b>Family:</b>	Married to Mike Reichner
<b>Education:</b>	B.S & M.S. in Science Education
<b>Business:</b>	Purple Haze Lavender
<b>Primary products:</b>	Lavender plants and more than 50 lavender products; tourist destination; retail outlets; wholesale distributor
<b>Employees:</b>	8 full-time; 23 part-time
<b>Annual Sales:</b>	\$1 million
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://www.purplehazelavender.com">www.purplehazelavender.com</a>
<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:info@purplehazelavender.com">info@purplehazelavender.com</a>
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### **Life – and Business – Down on the Lavender Farm**

Mike Reichner is somewhat of an impulsive guy.

After he and his wife Jadyne bought property on Washington's Olympic Peninsula, Mike attended a community meeting on growing lavender.

"He came home and announced that we were going to start a lavender farm," Jadyne said.

Being the analytical half of the team, she researched lavender and found that it was a promising possibility.

In 1996 they sold their boat and borrowed \$4,000 from Jadyne's mother for an irrigation system and 19 lavender plants. They traded and borrowed equipment, and friends helped ditch in pipes.

And in the Dungeness Valley on Bell Bottom Road, Purple Haze Lavender was born.

Purple Haze is a 7.5-acre organic farm, a tourist destination, a manufacturer of lavender products and a wholesale distributor with two retail outlets, all wrapped up in one diversified business employing 8 people full-time and 23 part-time.

Profit in the first year of operation was \$88; in 2003, that figure has grown to more than \$1 million.

In the early years of the business, Mike offered consultations to other farmers for \$50.

"I told him, we are not the experts. We can't do that," Jadyne said. "And he told me, 'Yes, we are. We have taken a lot of risks.'"

The risks taken by this complementary team resulted in not only a thriving business, but also their ideal lifestyle, with added community benefits such as a sustainable landscape and farmland preservation.

### **Finding Talents, Dividing Tasks**

One of the first challenges in riding the wave of lavender was creating a sustainable business team.

“In the beginning, it was a little rough, until we figured out how to divide the business,” Jadyne said.

Both Mike and Jadyne came from public service backgrounds. Mike grew up on a farm and worked in the Washington State park system. A former science teacher, Jadyne’s education was in biology. The first order of business was finding each person’s unique contribution to Purple Haze – and filling in gaps with additional employees.

“Mike’s always been an avid gardener and a compost advocate” Jadyne said, adding that he gravitated toward managing the farm and the landscaping. Also, having been a park ranger – and former park ranger of the year – Mike had a jump-start on running a tourist destination as well as a crew of farm workers.

“I love the public and retail part of it,” Jadyne said, adding that she found her niche in that and product development.

In the early years, they took 25 percent of the profits and hired a marketing consultant to do a brochure and create a press kit. But Jadyne found later that her biggest marketing tool was word-of-mouth.

“We did a survey and found that most people who came to the farm were referred by family and friends,” she said.

Jadyne then took on the bulk of marketing and public relations herself, creating catalogs, conducting tours and classes and organizing their part in the Dungeness Valley’s annual Lavender Festival.

With a keen eye for product development, Jadyne has created more than 50 items – from lavender soaps and spritzers to lotions and even salad dressing – sold on-farm, through catalogs, the Internet and wholesale.

Having successfully divided chores and made the most of their combined expertise, the Reichners realized that neither had the desire to do bookkeeping.

“Every business needs an entrepreneur to think in the future, a technician to make it happen and an accountant,” she said. “We had to hire the bookkeeper.”

As their staff grew, the Reichner team continued to think about adding various talents – a strategy that benefited the farm.

## **Stability through Diversity**

The Reichners have called lavender the “Swiss Army knife of herbs” with its numerous uses: fresh and dried bouquets, garden ornamentals, tinctures, scented sachets, culinary treats and even crystallized flowers for cakes, among others.

Believe it or not, Purple Haze is not just about lavender plants.

“The philosophy at Purple Haze is stability through diversity,” Jadyne said. “The success of our farm is based on an understanding of biodiversity in both the landscape and the business scape.”

With her strong background in Biology and Ecology, Jadyne knows the importance of a systems approach to land management. Her uncle ran a conventional farm in South Dakota, growing primarily corn. As in any monocultural system, his crop was more vulnerable to weather, pests and shaky economic conditions than a system containing a variety of plants and animals, she added.

“He moved the family to the Pacific Northwest after hail wiped out his crop for the last time,” she said.

With culinary herbs, an organic orchard, various gardens, chickens, a fish pond, wetlands with native plants and – of course – lavender fields, “There is a tremendous diversity in this landscape,” Jadyne said.

Not only good for the environment, diversity is a boost to the bottom line.

“It’s just a good approach to life,” Jadyne said. “If we had all of our eggs just in the agritourism basket, this would not work.”

Instead, the Reichners branched out beyond selling lavender plants to selling value-added products, inviting guests to visit the farm and traveling to speaking engagements. Spreading risks through spreading income makes economic sense for this duo.

The value-added products have proved a profitable move.

In the second year of their business venture, the Reichners and other members of a local lavender cooperative invited an expert from the East Coast to talk to them about the potential for growing and selling lavender in their region.

“He said we had a fabulous climate, but that we could never compete with France in the essential oil market. His advice was to create value-added ‘proprietary’ products,” said Jadyne, who then began researching lavender products, including taking a value-added workshop from the Washington Department of Agriculture.

Armed with expert advice and a science background, Jadyne began developing products such as lotions, sachets, lavender wands, chocolates, candles and her popular lavender spritzer and salad dressing. In the beginning, they started selling products off of their front porch. The porch got too crowded in 1999, and they built a drying shed also used as retail space and classrooms. In 2001, Purple Haze opened another retail store in town that houses production and shipping and receiving.

Today Purple Haze sells more than 50 lavender products. Jadyne contracts with others to make most of her creations, such as a local beekeeper for the honey products and three women who create hand-sewed products. But she herself travels to a commercial kitchen miles away to make the salad dressing.

Purple Haze products sell through catalogs, the Internet and more than 2,500 spas and stores across the country.

Another method of diversification at Purple Haze will be extending the lavender season so that plants and other products can be sold year round. The Reichners received a U.S. Department of Agriculture SARE grant (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program) to research the use of oyster shell mulch to increase flower production.

Purple Haze has evolved into a sustainable business with Jadyne and Mike multi-tasking their landscape and business scape.

## **Preserving Agriculture**

“Our success in business is deeply rooted in a commitment to preserving the agricultural heritage of the Dungeness Valley,” Jadyne said.

One of the country's last frontiers, the Valley knew only Indian's footsteps until the 1850s. At that time the first settlers came to cut down the thick stands of timber and clear land to plant crops. When irrigation ditches were built, the river furnished water for rich pasturelands, creating one of the top dairying spots in the country. For years the Valley remained a farming community, then change came.

Attracted by climate, living conditions, recreation and scenic beauty, an increasing number of retired people have settled here. Most farmsteads are now subdivided into retirement communities.

But the Reichners and other local growers found that the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains creates an ideal microclimate for growing lavender. With less than 20 inches of rain per year, the Valley is like those in the Provence region of France where this aromatic herb is native.

Even though the Valley is not the rural area it once was, small farms, such as Purple Haze, have helped maintain the landscape diversity and agricultural heritage. The Reichners and other local farmers work with organizations such as Friends of the Fields to help preserve farmland.

And agritourism brings people on to the farm to learn about and appreciate agriculture.

“A lot of people have become disconnected from their rural roots,” Jadyne said. “They find a deep sense of satisfaction here, like coming home.”

Jadyne also educates school children about farming and gives numerous tours of their operation.

And one of the biggest impacts of the Valley’s lavender industry comes from the Sequim Lavender Growers Association. This cooperative of more than 35 growers in the Valley work together to keep farming a viable option in the area.

“It’s a model for preserving agricultural lands and keeping small farms alive,” Jadyne said.

The cooperative meets monthly and collectively buys soil amendments, shares techniques and travels to France to learn more about lavender, among other cost-saving and educational endeavors.

And each year they organize a three-day celebration at the peak of lavender season.

As the Purple Haze website describes the Lavender Festival, “The Valley is filled with the color and fragrance of blooming lavender, and the entire town turns purple!”

The festival, in its seventh year, draws more than 35,000 people, boosting business at retail shops in town and educating the public about the beauty and diversity of small farms.

One of the major challenges faced by the Reichners – and many other small business owners in the tourist industry – is being thrust into the public eye.

With numerous speaking engagements and constant farm visitors – 500 to 1,000 on most summer days -- not to mention magazine spreads on Purple Haze in publications from *Forbes* to *Gourmet*, Jadyne said, “I feel like I live in a fishbowl.”

To counter this, the Reichners always take off in their camper in the off-season, Jadyne making time for kayaking and Mike for fishing.

“Since I’m a ‘type A’ personality, it’s tough for me to go away and leave the business like this,” Jadyne said, adding that it’s a necessary part of keeping themselves and the business healthy.

Aside from advising other business owners to take time off, Jadyne said that Mike would add, “Tell people that if they have an idea, take the risk. What have you got to lose? Your biggest mistake is not trying.”

She also emphasizes the advantages of copying the “big guys” and large retail outlets when doing marketing materials. And she mentions two hot tips she learned from Martha Stewart: work to create new marketing niches and develop things that make women’s lives easier, more comfortable and more organized.

As for future plans at Purple Haze, Mike is already contemplating start-up of a second business – in the fishing industry. Jadyne yearns to open a commercial kitchen closer to home to manufacture her lavender products. And her son plans to join the business with shade grown coffees, teas and ice creams. Mainly, they are just enjoying the purple plants of their labor, as well as the happiness this scented wonder brings to their customers.

“People love to be here and have that connection in the field. They just breathe in and release a big sigh,” she added. “They are just washed over by that purple haze.”

-By Lisa Bauer, 07/03

**For more information on ...**

... Purple Haze Lavender, go to <http://www.purplehazelavender.com>

...the Dungeness Valley's annual Lavender Festival, go to <http://www.lavenderfestival.com>

...the USDA SARE program, go to <http://www.sare.org>