

consultant at East Bay SBDC in Oakland, California. "You never know how it's going to be, what's going to happen, whether it'll be profitable immediately—or if it's even feasible."

Most black women start their business part-time, according to *Women Business Owners of Color*, a study by the Silver Spring, Maryland-based National Foundation for Women Business Owners. Nearly half, (48%) of African American women surveyed in 1997 say they started a business while working

\$100,000 business, with mostly corporate clients, on busy Bergen Turnpike in Ridgefield Park. Recently, she expanded into mail order and e-commerce activities (www.abasketfulofwishes.com), which boosted annual sales by 20%.

Starting up part-time enabled Dexter Merritt of Gaithersburg, Maryland, to build a successful art-publishing business that posted profits after four years. Merritt, 36, started Positive Black Images Inc. nine years ago while working for IBM Corp. in Texas. He financed and grew the

sition," says East Bay's Ekeh. "If an employer values your contribution, and you're in good standing, he or she may choose not to lose you completely."

DEVELOP A NETWORK OF ADVISORS

Most entrepreneurs aren't experts at running every aspect of their business, and are too close to be objective. So they need a team of advisors—an attorney, certified public accountant, lawyer and banker. You may also need a mentor—someone you can use as a sounding board. Good sources for mentors include the SBDC, SCORE or a membership-based organization such as the National Minority Business Council (877-275-6622, www.nmbc.org).

Ethnic By Design's Prince sought help from the One-Stop Capital Shop in Atlanta and Atkins at the SBDC. They helped her set up the infrastructure of her business, develop a strategy, write a business plan, determine her financial needs and assemble the financial package that she showed to three banks. Personal acquaintances and other entrepreneurs rounded out her advisory team.

GAIN CRITICAL FAMILY SUPPORT

Families and spouses may want to be supportive of the business, Gravelly says, but initially they may only see the sacrifices they'll have to make—in money, time you no longer spend with them and the perceived financial risks that you will have to take. Sit down and explain clearly what the business is about, what your plans are and what family support you'll need.

A supportive spouse can make the transition to full-time entrepreneurship much easier. Margaret Erving continued working full-time and paid the bulk of household bills while her husband, John, left his job

John Erving banked on his sales experience to start JonMar Creations with wife Margaret

full-time at another job, compared with 35% of Hispanic women and 22% of Asian and Caucasian women.

Shemayne Andie-Williams started part-time and took the leap into full-time entrepreneurship after two years with just \$4,000 of personal savings. She had been running A Basketful of Wishes, a gift basket business, from her Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, apartment while biding time in a "stagnant" corporate job. One day, she walked in and quit. Seven years later, she now runs a

business using his paychecks. By running small classified ads year after year, he painstakingly built a network of 20 freelance artists and nearly 8,000 full- and part-time distributors of art prints, posters, calendars and greeting cards. Today, Merritt is a full-time computer lab manager at Lockheed Martin in Gaithersburg, and his company—a part-time operation by choice—has sales of \$300,000.

"Cut down on your working hours and increase your business hours until you can make a full tran-



WILLIAM NEUMAN