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### **First Choice Bookkeeping: Keeping Small Businesses Running**

**HUNTINGTON, W.Va.** – As co-owner of First Choice Bookkeeping Inc. in Huntington, Rosemary Grant never dreamed she would someday be running a small business.

An educator by trade, Rosemary said her 39 years of experience as a high school English teacher prepared her very well for her entrepreneurial career.

“As a teacher, you have to look at each student and think of a way to help that student achieve and do their best,” Rosemary said. “The same thing is true in business. You have to look at a business to see where they are having problems and come up with ways to help.”

It is this philosophy, along with an excellent staff of accountants and bookkeepers that has led to First Choice Bookkeeping being selected as West Virginia’s 2010 **Financial Services Champion** by the U.S. Small Business Administration’s West Virginia District Office.

The idea behind the creation of First Choice Bookkeeping was actually the result of a business lunch between Rosemary’s husband and business partner, Tom, and his accountant Roberta Johnson, from Bagby Johnson & Associates, who also is a partner in the bookkeeping business.

“Tom, who has another business, Quality Products, told Roberta he had an empty office with a computer and telephone and thought ‘why don’t we start another business?’” Rosemary said. “He suggested a bookkeeping service and so First Choice Bookkeeping was created.”

Rosemary came on board in 2006, just after her retirement from her teaching career, to help out after the departure of one of the firm’s part-time employees. At the time, Rosemary was fully intending to work just three days a week. The company had about five clients and while Rosemary was in the process of “re-honing” her business and bookkeeping skills, she discovered she really liked her new role in the business world.

“It was really a surprise to me as I was an English teacher for so many years and not a numbers person,” Rosemary said. “But I soon discovered it’s not just about numbers; it’s about people and I have always considered myself a people person.”

At about the same time they launched First Choice Bookkeeping, the Grants had become involved with Business Network International (BNI). This involvement really helped expand their business contacts.

Tom explained, “BNI is a business organization that meets weekly, and each chapter is made up of individuals who represent one business field; for example, one banker, one insurance agent, and so on. Through these business contacts and word of mouth, we get referrals. Our membership in BNI has worked out so well that we haven’t found the need to do any formal advertising.”

Behind every successful business is always a good staff, and First Choice Bookkeeping is no exception. The staff, all of whom are women, consists of three full-time accountants, a full-time bookkeeper and receptionist and a part-time file clerk.

“They are the ones that really do the behind-the-scenes work in this company,” Rosemary said. “I’m the one that goes out, meets clients, and gets new business, but without their dedicated professional work, we wouldn’t have a company.”

What sets this business apart from other bookkeeping companies is the personalized service they provide. They take the time to sit down with clients and go over the numbers to make sure the client understands what the financial reports mean.

“We go over their profit and loss statements and explain what the numbers mean, where their numbers should be, and help them find ways to make their business more efficient and profitable,” Rosemary added. “You would be surprised how many businesses don’t understand the importance of knowing their numbers and thus are running their business “in the dark” so to speak.”

The Grants are very proud of the fact the services they provide have helped several businesses keep their doors open. Looking at a business from an objective, outsider’s point of view can be invaluable to a struggling business and understanding available options is so critical.

“That’s the most rewarding part of being in the business we are in,” Rosemary said. “Feeling like you have been able to make a difference in people’s lives.”

*First Choice Bookkeeping was nominated by Amber Wilson, center manager of the Small Business Development Center in Huntington.*

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