



Uptown Grill, LaSalle, IL Rita Farro, Rhonda, Lisa Furleigh, Carol Keller

This is a good news story. A great story of weighing options, risk taking and vision. Whether you are a small business owner, an aspiring entrepreneur, or reading as an individual, be prepared to ignite your own visions.

In 2014, Lisa Furleigh, founder & owner of Quilting in the Valley evaluated her situation, created a plan stirred with the love of quilting, and built supportive business and creative teams while magnifying her network of shopping fans to support her expanding Midwest dynasty of brick & mortar stores. Lisa freely gives advice, including a daily quote from Henry Ford, that I too live by:

#### Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you are right.

After reading Rita Farro's interview with Lisa reminiscing about catching the quilt bug while establishing a successful & demanding corporate career, you will want to meet Lisa in one of her Quilting in the Valley stores, and if that is not possible, go online to Facebook and YouTube. Lisa's enthusiasm is easy to catch. Prepare to be inspired!

Sew SCHMETZ & Grabbit® Too!

Rhonda Pierce Spokesperson, SCHMETZneedles.com info@SCHMETZneedles.com In this Issue:

Sewing Star: Lisa Furleigh

Page 3

Needle Points: SCHMETZ Chrome Microtex

Page 12

Cover: Quilting in the Valley

Story by: Rita Farro

https://ritassewfun.blogspot.com/

Pictures: Provided by

Lisa Furleigh

**Layout/Design: Paul Ragas** 

# What Inspires YOU to Sew?









There's an App for That!









## Lisa Furleigh





Lisa Furleigh, Quilting in the Valley Owner.

This story sounds so much like a fairy tale, it should start with *Once upon a time*....

In 2014, a woman who loved quilting decided to cash in her 401K and open a little quilt shop in a small town in the middle of the country. Business was so good, Quilting In The Valley in LaSalle, Illinois was forced to move to bigger quarters not once, but TWICE. Quilting In The Valley has become a BRAND, and by the end of 2020, QITV will have stores in four cities. Plans are in place to expand to 12 locations.

Really. This is happening.

To understand the secret sauce that is Quilting In The Valley, you've got to meet Lisa Furleigh. She is a Midwest girl born and raised. She was born in Indiana, attended the University of Iowa, and followed a then, now ex-husband to Illinois.

Growing up, she was passionate about music. She plays classical flute. She had a double major at the University of Iowa in liberal arts: Flute Performance and French. At the time, her idea was to become a music librarian, which requires a master's in music.

As a college student, she worked as a shift manager at a local Pizza Hut. At some point, she discovered that there were approximately 12 music librarians in the country, and they all made less than she would make if she accepted the promotion Pizza Hut was offering her.

Pizza won ....





Notice the inspiring words overseeing the LaSalle shop floor.

During her 18 years with Pizza Hut, she moved through Regional Auditor, Area Training, and District Manager positions. She left Pizza Hut for Wendy's and took a more structured District Manager position. After six years with Wendy's, she and her supervisor went to Dunkin Brands where she began as a Franchise Service Manager and became Manager of Training for Emerging Markets. She supervised the onboarding and training of franchisees and their teams in 26 states.

Remembering the last year she was with Dunkin Brands, Lisa says, I spent over 200 nights in hotels. We always stayed at the same brand hotels, so all Marriott Courtyards look the same to me! I got tired of waking up and not knowing what time zone or city I was in, then wandering around a parking lot clicking the door unlock trying to find my rental car. ©

After 30 years, Lisa was ready for a change. She was 52 years old, too young to retire, but definitely done with the corporate game. Quilting had become a passion in her life. In 1980, during her freshman year in college, she took her first quilt class at a local chain store. At that time, we cut out cardboard templates, used a pencil to draw the shapes on the fabric, and cut everything out with scissors to make a pillow top. (Which I still have!) Despite all that, I continued to stitch away and create things in my spare time.

During the time Lisa was working for the restaurant/hospitality industry, quilting had become a major focus for both her spare time and her creativity. One of her favorite perks was being able to visit quilt shops in every city she visited. The invention of a rotary cutter was INTENSELY exciting back in the day!





In 2014, two of her local quilt shops closed within one year of each other. Itching for a change in her life, and considering her passion for quilting, Lisa asked herself, Why not open a quilt shop of my own? That way, I'd have access to ALL THE latest gadgets and ALL the batiks. She calculated her expenses, projected cash flows, set a purchasing budget, and set off to look at real estate. All things came together, and she decided to cash out her 401K and invest in a quilt shop. I thought I could do a modest amount of business, have a bustling classroom where I would be able to spend time with like-minded quilters, and have the time of my life. As far as I was concerned, worst case scenario would be I'd have the best sewing room in Illinois!

Very early on, Lisa determined that you MUST have a broad range of offerings in order to draw in a larger customer base. Although she did not open with machines, she decided fairly early on that she needed to partner with a sewing machine company. She chose BERNINA, and has never looked back.

Lisa's professional life was all about coaching and teaching managers and franchisees how to grow their businesses. So, from the first day she opened Quilting in the Valley, she would look around the shop and ask herself what she could do better today than she did yesterday? What was missing for her customers? What could she afford to provide for them? What will bring them back more frequently? What does she have to offer that no one else does?

When Lisa is buying new merchandise for QITV, she considers the options available, and then provides the best option at the best price they can manage. We also offer machine education





Lisa with Carol Keller.
Yes, they have two SCHMETZ Super Demo Needles!

ongoing and FREE! Even to people who didn't buy their machines from us.

I absolutely LOVE working with teams. Bringing together a diverse group of people and allowing them all the leeway to let their own individual light shine has always been something I enjoyed.

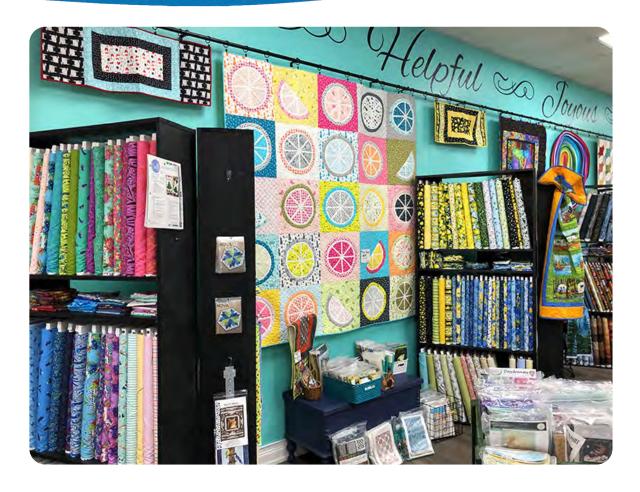
Quilting in the Valley was a busy shop from the very first day. After a year, they outgrew the original location. They moved six blocks east and doubled their space to 2500 square feet. For the next three years, QITV added staff, and classes, they were doing very well with the machines, and added AccuQuilt into the mix.

In May of 2019, the second Quilting in the Valley opened in Moline, Illinois. After some growing pains around how to

manage a quilt shop over longer distances, Lisa decided that it was kind of fun to open a new store and bring on new folks to join the team! She decided to open a third store in Rockford in November of 2019.

In the middle of the two openings, a shop owner who had lost her partner approached Lisa to ask if she needed somebody to manage the LaSalle location. She was looking to reduce her workload and increase her time with family while staying in the quilt business. BEST addition EVER! Carol Keller became QITV's multi-unit manager, and with her on board, Lisa decided to open the Champaign location in the spring of 2020. Once we had four locations in place, we decided to grow our family to 12 locations. My original goal was six, but heck, we're practically there! What would we look forward to once we hit six?





Clearly, Lisa's prior career with territory management and organizational skills are coming into play, as well as her experience with training, infrastructure, and delivery. I'm used to working with project leaders and giving autonomy to people so they can drive their own results. Managing multiple locations is not as hard as you might think. I believe in giving people the opportunity to succeed.

My group of employees has been fundamental in building our brand. We have a BRAND! We have regular off site meetings and Zoom meetings where we brain storm, problem solve, and just throw out ideas to see what will stick. I have a web/marketing manager, and admin assistant, a multi-unit manager, store managers for each store, and a BERNINA expert in each store. They all have specific goals as well as shared goals.

Plans were in place, and the four Quilting InThe Valley locations were just starting to coalesce when the whole disease of the century thing hit. The Champaign store (#4) was scheduled to open on April 1, 2020. Then, boom, pandemic!!

Lisa had been broadcasting on Facebook Live every week for two years. When Illinois shutdown, she went on Facebook LIVE each and every day. Customers were worried and anxious. Nobody knew what was going to happen next. It felt like the sky was falling. Lisa began each daily broadcast with an upbeat attitude, smiling, reassuring people that we will get through this. She also talked about how people in different jobs were dealing with this shut down. And she included pleas to support your local restaurants, hair dressers, florists, medical professionals. Her message was we all need to do what we can to stay safe.



The official order to shut down came on March 20th. It was devastating. We really thought that might take us down. Carol (my multi-unit manager) and I went through the store at 5PM, gathering up all the stuff we needed to sew at home. Our only plan was to have fresh samples to open up with, whenever that might happen.

The very next day, the local hospital contacted us and asked if we would coordinate mask sewing with materials they provided to be used at the hospital. I immediately got on the phone and called the local authorities to ensure that we would be OK to work in the store, behind closed doors.

They gave us the go ahead. For the next several weeks, Carol and I worked by ourselves, handing out precut packs of masks for people to sew and bring back. The hospital picked them up

a couple times per week. I continued to broadcast on Facebook daily, and we had people asking us for things to keep them busy. We began adding quick-quilt specials where we did the work, provided a free pattern that used a precut, and then shipped it.

During that time, the phone was ringing off the hook with customers looking for all kinds of things. It was all we could do to keep up with them, working 11-12 hour days, 7 days per week for the first two weeks. Employees from other locations joined us.

In the middle of all this, we decided to pump up our YouTube channel and add more tutorials to support some of the things we sell and use.





QITV is a fan of SCHMETZ Microtex.

I woke up every day asking myself 'what can we do better today than we did yesterday?', 'what can we offer to our customers that they will appreciate most?', 'how can we evolve to meet the demands of our new customers?'

#### When asked about the secret to her success, Lisa said this,

Ifocus on running my own business. I can't pay attention to what other shops are doing, other than to just keep up on trends. As you get more and more successful, there are other businesses that are watching and will blame you for their lack of success. You are guaranteed to lose the blame game.

Case in point: Amazon and other online quilt shops are impacting my sales because they discount/are available 24 hours a day/have bigger budgets than I do/etc.

How can Quilting In The Valley compete with that?

- We are open 7 days per week, with competent quilters available to provide hands on assistance
- We upgraded our website to offer online sales 24 hours per day, with robust product offerings
- We provide knowledge, education, and sew alongs as added value. Things Amazon can NEVER do.
- We frequently sing the praises of small businesses and support small businesses in our own purchasing and community.

So, the first and most important piece of advice I could offer to anyone is simple. RUN YOUR OWN BUSINESS!!!





A QITV mobile is necessary to scoot between locations.

Second piece of advice: If you say you can't, you're right!

Self-doubt seems to be a prominent female trait. We need to stop second guessing ourselves and dream about where we want to be in five years, make a plan, set goals, and go for it! I'm not saying all risk is good, simply that we often don't reach for our dreams because we fear failure. Well thought out and planned risk is often all it takes to unlock the doors to success!

Ask yourself what the worst thing that could happen would be, and if the answer is something you can live with, then go for it!

Third piece of advice: Be authentic. Your customers are all shopping at multiple locations. They know who is doing what. When you try to recreate someone else's business model, your customers know that. Create your own! Be yourself, be natural, positive and relatable. Do your own thing! Authenticity always attracts!

Mark Twain's quote, Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life, might sound like a cliché. But Lisa Furleigh is a living example that he got it right.

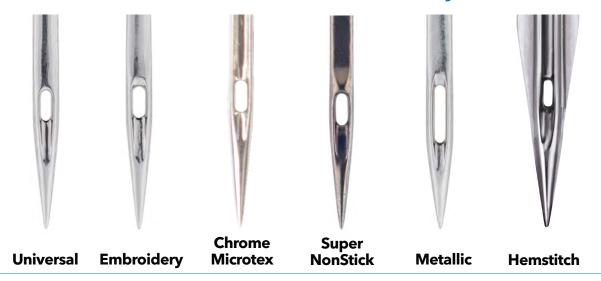
www.QuiltingInTheValley.com







# Needle Eyes, Points, and Tips Matter!







Needles don't last forever.

Change the needle!

Stitch quality improves & the sewing machine performs better with a new needle!





### Compliments of Your Local Retailer



