



## Owners In Training

ENTREPRENEURS

After 33 years in retail, Marjorie Stern had a new idea. How about a kids store that sells... careers? BY SARAH BERNARD



### Retail Résumé

In the seventies, Marjorie Stern had three stores, all called Pizazz, which sold kitschy T-shirts and, at her Bleeker Street location, gifts like a doll called **Gay Bob (1)** (he came boxed in a closet). Business was great for twelve years. Then there was a holdup at the Lexington Avenue Pizazz and a suicide—

a bereft jumper landed in the doorway the day John Lennon was shot. Burned out, Stern sold the leases and worked with her husband, who produced **fragrances (2)** for Oscar de la Renta. They sold the business to Avon in 1987, and with a portion of the proceeds started Big Wood foundation to support kid-centric causes like a charter elementary school in the Bronx.

### A Retail Epiphany

But Stern missed her stores. In 2005 she dreamed up a way to merge retail with her Big Wood mission: Open a children's store and staff it with teenagers from the Children's Aid Society. C.A.S. would

receive 100 percent of the store's profits. The kids would get **\$8 an hour (3)** from Big Wood, but more importantly, they'd learn the business.



### A Store Is Born

After a two-year search for a location with mommy traffic and reasonable rent, Stern found a tiny former one-hour photo shop "in hideous shape" around the corner from the Children's Museum. She got \$20 bookcases at IKEA and lighting equipment from

Canal Street (\$1,200). An architect friend planned the space for half her usual fee.

### Staffing Up

C.A.S. figured they'd get a handful of interested candidates; they got 80. Last May, Stern held a retail-training boot camp. What do you do with a demanding client? (Remain polite.) What if a **rambunctious toddler (4)** tries to tear the place apart? (Sit down with



the kid and a book.) "Even if they don't stay in retail," says Stern, "I figured they'll learn how to deal with people."

### A Group Effort

The store opened in July, to an empty city. When the first customer came in she says, "we took a picture." Ideas came fast. Maria, 23, suggested adding more clothing. Stanley, 19, offered to play **guitar (5)** on weekends. They started the month doing \$300 a day and ended at \$600. A verbally abusive neighbor accused them of stealing his business. Stern took the kids to file a police complaint, saying, "When you're an entrepreneur, it's your responsibility to make it work."

### Up Next

Stern's goal is to do \$2,000 a day during the last quarter of the year, and to see her program expanded by national retailers. This month, the first fourteen staffers "graduated." "It's a small store," she says. "The problem now is, no one wants to leave."

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she says, "we took a picture. Ideas came fast. Maria