



Photography by Nathan Harrmann

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• A step up

Sometimes, even a blister can spur an “ah-ha” moment.

Five years ago, Whitefish Bay’s Jennifer Lovitt Riggs was walking across the huge parking lot outside the Pentagon. A management consultant at the time, she was on her way to deliver an intelligence briefing to one of the joint chiefs when she felt a blister forming on her foot. As she hobbled toward the entrance, she looked over at her male colleagues and thought: “They’re not uncomfortable. They’re mentally reviewing their analysis and presentations,” recalls Riggs. “This is not right!”

A discouraging quest for professional, but comfortable, shoes soon followed. “They were clunky and frumpy or really not that comfortable. Some were made with cheaper synthetics, were too casual or they cost in the \$400 range.”

So she responded to the problem like a consultant. Her research told her there was no economic or technical reason why women’s footwear couldn’t be cute and comfortable. Not only that, the questions she was asking seemed to stir up something deep in women. At one point, she sent market surveys to 50 women and received more than 300 responses back, as those women passed it on to friends.

In 2002, Riggs started a women’s shoe company called Nota Bene. Switching gears from consultant to entrepreneur has been a challenge, but her background in problem-solving was a great foundation. “Networking was huge, too,” says Riggs. “People were so interested, helpful and supportive.”

Nota Bene now has 10 employees working from virtual offices across the country and suppliers worldwide. The shoes cost around \$200 and are sold at stores in 14 states, including A Shoe Affair in Mequon. They’re also sold online at notabeneshoes.com, but Riggs emphasizes the importance of an educated salesperson who can properly fit the shoes. “Each shoe isn’t for every foot shape,” Riggs says. “Shoes are the only article of clothing that can impact your long-term health and mobility. Comfort is not just a nicety. Eighty-five percent of podiatrists’ patients, nationally, are women.”

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