

BUSINESS INTERIORS

Does Inside Job at JCPenney

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In 1990, when JCPenney broke ground on its new headquarters in Plano, Texas, one of the first things the company's buyers did was call on Irving-based Business Interiors to plan for the furnishings for the 1.9 million square feet of space.

As the building opened two years later to the oohs and ahhs of employees and well-wishers, perhaps nobody was happier than Joan Miller. She had opened Business Interiors (B.I.) in 1970 at the urging of friends who recognized her talent for design and had become a part of a professional team of architects, decorators and designers that transformed JCPenney's massive new home into an ergonomic, welcoming, aesthetically pleasing habitat for national commerce.

Miller has stepped back a bit, but is still involved in the business. Her daughter, Kathy White, has proudly stepped into the roll of president, but insisted, *"Mom is still the boss! She knows this business from the ground up."*

"It was a different world when Mom first opened the business," recalled White, who joined B.I. in 1982. *"When my mother would meet with vendors for the first time, they would ask her if they could talk to her husband. They weren't prepared to deal with a woman."*

Undeterred, the mother of three took care of her children during the day and worked on drawings at night. As White says, Miller didn't go into business, *"the business came to her."* Miller was soon able to hire a part-time bookkeeper and the business finally took off when she hired a designer who helped with sales. Her first major client was a financial services firm that needed interior design and furnishings for offices across the country.

Prior to joining her mother, White worked in public accounting in Denver. *"I enjoyed what I was doing, but I missed Texas and liked the idea of working with my mother,"* she said.

Today, B.I. employs 150 workers and owns 300,000 square feet of office and warehouse space. In addition to design and space planning services, the firm offers furniture, carpet, and will refurbish old furniture and find used and rental furniture.



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www.businessinteriors.com

B.I. is not just about furniture placement and space design, however. The company offers a wide array of services including computerized inventory management, and ergonomics assessment.

Not all of B.I.'s clients are as big as JCPenney, however, and regardless of the size of the budget; a company has requirements that must be met, according to White. While the firm has served many large clients, it has a separate division called B.I.Express that handles smaller customers and start-up businesses.

White said that the factor that separates B.I. from its competitors is service and continuity. *"Our people differentiate us,"* she explained. *"Twenty-five percent of our employees have been with us 10 years or more and 60 percent of employees have been here five to 10 years. We have such wonderful people working for us and we have continuity in management and culture."*

"And our service and attention to detail is outstanding," she continued. *"We don't turn away when something goes wrong."*

JCPenney procurement officer Ed McCurtain agreed. *"It all comes down to service,"* he stated. *"On the rare occasion that we have a problem, they step up to the plate. There's never been a time when they didn't come through for us. They have the knowledge and the contacts."* He added that, in addition to outfitting JCPenney headquarters, B.I. provides new stores with office furniture.

"The relationship with JCPenney has enhanced B.I.'s presence in diversity programs through networking initiatives, such as the Women's Business Council," said White, who added that B.I. is a certified woman-owned business. JCPenney named B.I. its building equipment supplier of the year twice and bestowed a supplier diversity award to the company in 2003.

"Over 15 years of partnering with JCPenney has helped B.I. better understand goals and directives of large corporate clients," said White. *"We are better able to respond to the needs of the corporate environment."*

"We have definitely benefited from our relationship with B.I.," McCurtain stated. *"They have the knowledge, the contacts and a can-do attitude. It's a great value for JCPenney."*

