

ESSEX Living

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ESSEX WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS



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From finance directors to fashion designers, top police officers to salon bosses we wanted to showcase just how diverse, how talented, how incredible our women in business are

New Government statistics showing that more women are working than ever before (some 15.3million in fact) come as no surprise. And from chief executives, company directors and property developers, to interior designers, bestselling authors and charity founders – Essex is home to some of the best businesswomen in the UK.

Indeed, female employment rates in the south east are the highest in the UK (75 per cent of women work here.)

Some 1.5million of us are self-employed, 29 per cent of directors at FTSE100 companies are women, and there are now zero all-male boards in the FTSE100.

This is despite a 17.9 per cent gender pay gap and many of us mothers working that seemingly invisible third shift.

While women in Essex are literally shaping the future of the county (Thurrock Council with CEO Lyn Carpenter at the helm has an expenditure of £500million. Essex's University has 15,000 students for Deputy Vice-Chancellor Prof Lorna Fox O'Mahony to help guide). We often fail to shout about our successes and work wins.

So, in this edition of Essex Living magazine we aim to change this.

We selected 50 of the most inspirational women in business from across our county's industries to create this Essex Women Mean



Business issue.

From finance directors to fashion designers, top police officers to salon bosses we wanted to showcase just how diverse, how talented, how incredible our women in business are.

All 50 of our Essex Women Mean Business success stories attended our exclusive photoshoot at Prested Hall, with Essex photographer Louise Clarke.

There they shared their top career tips, gave us insights into how they built their businesses and were brutally honest about the realities of making it in the 21st century.

And the interviews on the following pages are unashamedly uplifting and rousing.

That's despite the fact that, for many, it's been a far from easy road to the success they currently enjoy.

Southend-based charity Gold Geese was founded by Katie Southgate after her daughter was diagnosed with a blood cancer in 2014, aged just one. Two years of high dose chemo followed, and she is now in year 1 at school - but Katie was left with a desire to provide support and gifts to children fighting cancer and their families.

Tina Townsend set up Acacia Business Services Ltd 20 years ago, after suffering not one, but two strokes, aged just 30.

Bestselling author Kimberley Chambers was working as an Essex

mini-cab driver and sick of her life when she penned her first book.

Counsellor Bridgette Smith survived domestic violence and went from living in a refuge to helping hundreds of other women fleeing abusers. Christina Hamilton refused to let being dyslexic stand in the way of her studying for a degree in fashion accessories and then founding the School of Leather Craft.

Others have faced redundancies, juggled more than one job, have battled mental health illnesses, bankruptcy and relationship breakdowns.

But one thing they all share is All of them are incredible.

These women are literally THE who's who of our most inspiring women in business in 2019.

They epitomise all that is good about Essex women who are carving careers - all at different stages of their working lives, in different industries and from different walks of life.

We are so proud to stand alongside them and to share their successes with you.

Don't forget, as well as the interviews on these pages, you can also check out our videos with some of our fab 50 on Instagram... find us at @essexlivingmag or follow the hashtag #EssexWomenMeanBusiness

AMANDA COULSON, 54

CEO and Founder of SVC Group Ltd, SVC Training Ltd, SVC Technical Ltd, SVC Safety Solutions LLP



Amanda Jayne Coulson, 54, "Having worked in the recruitment industry for many years, I made the decision to set up SC Group Ltd in 1999," Amanda explains. "The decision was based on my passion to improve the industry and make it more human."

"Initially the business was just me, one desk and an overdraft of £5k. Against all the advice of don't do it, I ploughed on as I was determined to succeed."

And she certainly has done that.

"Within one year my business plan was achieving £400k turnover," she recalls. Primarily the business was set up with the intention of delivering a different recruitment experience for the client and the candidate," she explains.

"After a few months I was hit with HR and H&S issues and it came to light that I needed experts in that field to help me. So that's what I did and then I thought, Okay if I feel this, my clients will too, and SVC HR and SVC H&S were born."

And she's not slowed down since!

"My hours are whatever it takes, even after 20 years. Why? because I absolutely love my job."

• svcgroup.co.uk

KATIE SKINGLE, 38

KAT Marketing owner/director



Katie always thought she would one day have her own business - she just didn't know what it would be.

But that changed when she had her daughter and today her Colchester-based PR and marketing firm is thriving, with clients that include Fenwick, Colchester Zoo and Essex County Council.

"My first job was a Lloyds Bank Financial Advisor. I moved into marketing when I

was working as a national account manager for a London Marketing company and trained on the job. I had always thought I would start my own business, but was never sure what form that would take. Once I had my daughter, it was a natural progression to set up for myself locally.

"KAT Marketing is a full creative marketing and communications agency, delivering digital and traditional marketing campaigns as well as public relations, communication services and event management in Essex, London and across the East of England. Our innovative, meticulous and highly practical approach to all strands of marketing allows us to channel our clients' strengths to achieve the desired results.

"My financial planning background has proved helpful for understanding starting up a business and also maintaining one."

• katmarketing.co.uk

CHRISTINE BHATT, 49

Systematics International Limited's Chief Executive Officer



As the first female chair of the Institute of Directors, and the woman at the helm of award-winning data processing company Systematics International, Christine is a businesswoman with an enviable career.

And it all started with an interview in France - which included a tour of Paris.

"I stumbled into this career and after graduating from university," she recalls. "I got an interview for the role of a data analyst for an agricultural company in France, all expenses paid with a tour of Paris, which I could not really turn down! I got offered the job and moved up the corporate ladder in a short pace of time.

"In the year 2000, I was head-hunted for a business development role at Systematics and eventually performed a management buy-out (MBO)

in 2007. Never in my dreams did I think this would happen, I have thoroughly enjoyed my journey!"

But what exactly is Systematics, which is based in Battlesbridge... and what does her working day look like?

"Systematics is a multi-award-winning, ISO 27001 certified data processing company which collects, aggregates and delivers data and market information for multiple industries, including the agricultural, industrial and construction equipment industries," she explains.

"I have a varied role within the business with a key focus on growing our people through a number of initiatives. I also have responsibility of growing the business by expanding our current range of services into existing and new markets.

"No two days are the same in our business, we could be talking to a customer in Japan first thing in the morning and later to another one in the USA. I still like my 'to do lists' though and first thing every morning I'll review and prioritise tasks that require my attention."

• systematics-int.co.uk