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## Woman-owned trucking company a model of business success

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When she started her trucking business almost a decade ago, Pasadena resident Joni Suller was carrying freight overflow from other companies in a Ford Economy van and reeling in a little more than \$18,000 a year. She ran a three-person operation out of her driveway and used a picnic table as a desk.

"I didn't even get a paycheck for the first two years," Suller said. "Everything I had had to go back into the company."

Suller now sits at the helm of Eagle Express, a Harmans-based trucking company that provides re-

tail distribution for companies such as Fashion Bug, Lane Bryant and Nine West. The company grossed about \$3.3 million last year.

With 36 employees and a fleet of about 20 trucks, Eagle Express is now headquartered in the 40,000-square-foot Harmans warehouse Suller owns.

It hasn't been easy being one of the few females to own a trucking business in the "good old boys" atmosphere of the industry, Suller said.

"You have to be tough, because you are in a male-dominated environment every day," she said.

Her thriving business is one of the approximately 12,790 women-owned businesses in the county, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Anne Arundel has the third-highest number of women-owned businesses in the state.

"In Anne Arundel County, I felt safer, it's closer to home and it put me in a better area for an employee base" than other counties in the state, Suller said.

Suller also credits the county's Economic Development Corporation.

"I think her success is more about careful planning and doing her homework," said Alexis Henderson, vice president of the Anne Arundel County Economic Development Corporation.

Suller started Eagle Express — a name her children came up with — after languishing for 10 years as a customer relations representa-

tive for Bell Atlantic. She applied for minority certification and then bought a van, in which she carried overflow work for smaller delivery companies.

After about nine months, she started cold-calling companies, eventually landing the account that would catapult her to success: Fashion Bug.

Other companies started to take notice of Suller after she was handling more than 100 stores for Fashion Bug. She began to build up her clientele, along with a truck fleet and a full staff. She credits her success to her "honesty and integrity."

"I sell from the heart," Suller said. "People go out and do sales all the time, but if you can't make them



Joni Suller founded Eagle Express as a retail distribution company in 1997 and is now the owner of the warehouse they operate from in Harmans.

— Jessie Webb/Examiner

believe in you, you're on ground zero."

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