

## Reading tea leaves, she sees success brewing

Consultants in 40 states sell her tea by hosting parties, educating guests

By LAURA LUETTGER

**W**orking as a stay-at-home mother after the birth of her first child, Charlene Phillips was looking for a way to contribute to the family income.

At first, she mulled selling her recipes for baked goods, like scones, to tea rooms. Instead, she ended up creating Tealightful Treasures Inc., a direct-selling business that has attracted national attention.

Located in Gates, Tealightful Treasures offers a host of products, from loose teas, tea sets and mixes for baked goods to bath soaps and herbal sleeping aids. It works through tea consultants nationwide, who purchase tea party kits from the local company and then host parties to sell its products.

**PROFILE**  
Tealightful  
Treasures Inc.

Tealightful Treasures began as a way for Phillips, 44, to connect with others and share her products. She started in 2000 with a line of homemade teas and mixes for baked goods, and when clients began asking if they could sell those products as well, Phillips decided it was time to grow.

Since Phillips expanded her business to allow others to sell her products in 2003, the number of consultants has grown steadily. Tealightful Treasures now has consultants in more than 40 states.

"We're adding states so quickly I'm beginning to lose track," says Phillips, who is the founder and CEO of the company.

Consultants range from college students to women in their 70s, she says. Men also are expressing interest in joining the team.

Phillips says many of the consultants use their job as a way to get back on their feet after difficult times, she says. Some are cancer or stroke survivors; while others just want to be able to contribute to their families' incomes. They can do this by hosting parties or by setting up tables at

events.

"We've created the business, training, product line and how to be successful," Phillips says. "It's the ease of doing business. We try to take the guesswork out of everything."

Each consultant pays a down payment of \$99 for the first kit, which includes teas, tea sets and information about the products. After hosting the first few parties, most consultants are able to pay off the rest of the price of the kit, which totals \$150.

The kits are packaged by Phillips' husband, Eric, Tealightful Treasures' vice president. The company employs five people.

There is no cost to hosting a tea party, Phillips says. Each customer usually spends approximately \$35 to \$40 on tea products at each party. Consultants may make up to a 32 percent commission on sales at the tea parties. Average customer sales are roughly \$425 per party.

Most teas cost \$7.50 for two ounces, which makes 24 to 28 cups. Popular teas currently are variations of rooibos, a tea loaded with antioxidants that is supposed to be a calming draught.

The consultants educate the guests on the tea and different products. Themes for each party depend on the kits the consultants have, or what the clients request. Tealightful Treasures offers themes like mother and daughter tea parties, special occasion tea parties and relaxation tea parties.

"A party can be as casual or as formal as you want it to be," Phillips says.

Teas change with the season, she says. In the fall, Tealightful Treasures tends to offer warmer, spicy teas. In southern states, it tends to offer both iced and warm teas year-round, she says.



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

**Charlene Phillips plans to build her business by adding consultants and expanding her product line.**

"Things are more defined here," she says. "No one drinks iced tea now."

Although most of the advertising for Tealightful Treasures is word-of-mouth, it must be working, Phillips says. Sales are up by 20 percent from last year.

For now, Phillips is looking to continue to add consultants. Tealightful Treasures also is studying ways to improve its product line, even though it just added 40 new products, she says.

Phillips also hopes more people in the Rochester area will learn of Tealightful Treasures' existence through tea-tasting events. The firm plans to host one Nov. 12.

"We have serious goals," she says. "We're always looking to expand and improve and get out of our comfort zone. That's how we improve."

*Laura Luetger is a Rochester Business Journal intern.*