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## Catering-success Barbara Llewellyn is life of the party

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Barbara Llewellyn doesn't pine for the past, when she was a one-woman operation planning, cooking and cleaning for her catering clients.

Revenue for her 19-year-old company, Barbara Llewellyn Catering and Event Planning, has increased 57 percent over the past three years, to \$2.6 million in 2005. As her full-time staff has doubled in that same period to 16 employees, her delegating skills have become crucial.



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Barbara Llewellyn  
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"Some people say, 'Oh, I can't tell people what to do,'" she said. "But I love to farm out all the things I have in my head for people to do and then have the satisfaction of seeing what I've accomplished."

What she's accomplished has been steady growth fueled by customer and employee loyalty. Forty percent of Llewellyn's business comes from repeat customers.

Tom Crowley Jr., president of Oakland's **Crowley Maritime Corp.**, is among her devotees.

"Others can have good chefs, good food, but the party is a bummer when stuff comes out not timed properly or comes out cold," he said. "That's never the case with her."

A degree in art history never translated into a teaching job, and in the 1970s Llewellyn ended up at **Hyatt Corp.**, transferring to California to help open hotels and manage their food operations.

Llewellyn married in 1979, left Hyatt in 1980 and moved to Orinda in 1983. She has two children.

Her business began when she catered a friend's party. She worked out of her home until 1991, when County Health Services encouraged her to find a new location.

"I think my neighbor was tired of waking up at 8 a.m. to the smell of BBQ," she laughed.

She found an incongruously located kitchen in Oakland - nestled among a dozen auto repair shops - and rented a small corner. She bought the property with an SBA loan in 2002. Llewellyn recently purchased the building across the street, doubling her work space.

She credits much of her success to her employees, and they throw the love right back.

"She has a tremendous amount of positive energy that she passes along," said Christine Berlin, an event planner for Llewellyn. "She allows people the freedom to see what they can do."

Ann Blackburn, president of the **Women's Presidents Organization** to which Barbara belongs, says personnel relations are Barbara's biggest strength.