

*Our story of Susan Kruse is the second in a series of entrepreneur stories from Pottawattamie County Iowa and the HomeTown Competitiveness Initiative.*



## Susan Kruse

### Unlikely, Likely Entrepreneur

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#### About Susan

Susan Kruse grew up in and now lives in a family that loves games. And it is this love of games, along with other factors, that has moved Susan to create a new company **Dixie Moo Games** and her first game creation, **Caption Throwdown**. At first blush, Susan is an unlikely entrepreneur. She is an Oncology Nurse which is not your typical starting point for becoming an entrepreneur. So we checked our list of entrepreneurial attributes:

- ✓ Creative
- ✓ Likes to Build Things
- ✓ Committed to Completing a Project
- ✓ A Learner, Networker and Problem Solver
- ✓ A Team Builder
- ✓ Been in Business Before (Day Care Center)
- ✓ Willingness to Receive Help

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Susan scores high on all these attributes and while she has not yet become famous with her new business venture, she is on that road to becoming an entrepreneur. Like Susan, entrepreneurial research clearly shows that successful entrepreneurs come from all walks of life, careers and experiences. In America, there is still opportunity for a good idea to be turned into a great business with vision, hard work, determination and some luck.

#### Why Start a Business?

We have talked with thousands of entrepreneurs over the past two decades and we always ask this one question, “Why are you doing this?” Understanding motivation is important in appreciating the role entrepreneurs play in our communities and economy. Susan’s response was preceded by a light laugh and followed with a serious answer. “I needed a project!” Susan’s work, family and other interests do not leave much time, but Susan is the kind of person who is always ready for a new challenge. Like other entrepreneurs, making something happen fulfills a creative urge for Susan.

### Dixie Moo Games & Caption Throwdown

As we mentioned earlier in this story, Susan is part of a family of game players. So the origins of Dixie Moo Games and Caption Throwdown date back to Christmas 2011. Over the holidays, Susan's sister, Kathy Peters of Omaha, suggested that they think up a new game. The wheels of creativity were started. By New Year's Eve, an idea was emerging.

The game is themed around photography with 150 vintage photos that are funny or interesting. A player chooses a picture and each player looks at the same picture as it is passed around the group. The game provides filmstrips and each player writes their own picture caption. After the captions are written, they are given to the *developer* who reads them anonymously to the group. The person that selected the picture gets to choose their favorite caption, and the person who wrote it scores 5 points. The rest of the players then vote for their favorite caption and whoever wrote each of those selected receives 1 point. The group can play until a set score is achieved or they can just keep playing! No players are eliminated, the captions are read anonymously so no one feels silly about what they wrote, and the best part of the game is that it uses the players' imagination and creativity to bring family and friends together! It is a lot of laughs.

The game evolved and was tested with informal focus groups and by the following June 2012, Susan and her brother, Mike Carta of Omaha, formed Dixie Moo Games as a limited liability corporation (Mike has since left Dixie Moo on good terms). Moving to production was the next step and on Christmas Eve 2012, the first edition games, 100 in all, were delivered.



Caption Throwdown Board Game

### Keys to Success...



Dixie Moo Games and Susan Kruse are still a work in progress. A lot has been accomplished in just one year and six months. But so much more needs to happen before Susan and her venture can be classified an entrepreneurial success. Susan has gotten a long way down the entrepreneurial start-up road and we want to share some of her keys to success thus far:

**Open To Learning.** Susan is a life-long student. She loves learning and seeks out information, expertise and ideas. Creative people have a hunger for discovery and learning even with topics not directly tied to their venture. Individuals who struggle with entrepreneurship often believe they have all the answers and are too wedded to their own ideas and perceptions of reality. They unfortunately have quit asking

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questions. Or when they do ask questions, they are looking for validation of what they have already concluded, not new insight.

**Networker.** A key to Susan's ability to learn and grow is she is a natural networker. She is willing to get out there and make contact with resources she believes might be able to help her and her venture succeed. Networking has always been central to successful entrepreneurship, but in today's environment the opportunities are vast given electronic communication like the Internet and emails.

**Actually Uses Help.** Susan benefits from her maturity and life experience. She is a good judge of who can help and where not to waste time. While she is open to asking questions and taking advice, she is wise and takes advantage of those resources that can help her meet her needs and dreams. She is smart and actually uses the help from those she trusts.

**Work Ethic.** Susan has a strong work ethic. She understands that anything worth doing requires hard work and dedication. She loves the process of creating and is attentive to details. As she put it, she likes working through things from "A to Z." She values the sense of accomplishment when a project makes progress. This sense of accomplishment brings her joy and self-worth.

### The Role of Coaching

Susan, like other entrepreneurs in Pottawattamie County Iowa, is being helped by an innovative economic development program employing business coaching. Susan was asked three questions with respect to business coaching and how it is helping her realize her entrepreneurial dream. Here are the questions and her answers:

*How would you describe the value of this assistance?*

"The help that I have received from John has been significant. I know that if I have a question, he will find me an answer if he doesn't already know it. He has agreed to meet with me every time I have asked. He is present and that is a very valuable thing to know you have."

*Susan Kruse*

*To what extent do you believe this assistance will benefit your vision for your business in the future?*

"As my business starts to take off, I know that I have John in my corner. He is there to help me succeed. He has given me resources that I could not have found on my own. He may not realize it but I plan on using him as a mentor for a very long time."

*Susan Kruse*

*What kind of assistance are you getting from the business coach that you were not accessing in the past?*

"I started my business with help from Mr. Adams. He has given ideas related to finances, sales, marketing and, most of all, encouragement to continue down a path full of unknowns."

*Susan Kruse*



Caption Throwdown Images

Creating and growing a business is a journey. Along the way successful entrepreneurs freely admit that there are many folks and organizations that help in meaningful ways. Here is a sampling of those who have been part of Susan Kruse's entrepreneurial journey.

### Helping Hands – It Takes a Village

*In the final analysis each entrepreneur is responsible for their success or failure. But the idea of a self-made entrepreneurial success runs contrary to overwhelming research on contributing factors. Spouses, friends, investors, key employees, technical resources and the like are part of the formula for success.*

*Susan Kruse readily acknowledges all those who have helped her during her journey. She recognizes that her success has been stimulated, enabled and supported by many helping hands.*

#### **Christmas 2011 through 2012.**

Family, friends and vendors all provided encouragement and assistance during the idea to product phase of development.

#### **Sue Pitts, Iowa Small Business Development.**

One of Susan's first calls was to Sue Pitts, a business counselor located at Iowa Western Community College. It was a cold call and Sue helped Susan get oriented on how to proceed.

#### **Starting a Business Course.**

Sue suggested that Susan take Iowa Western Community College's Starting a Business Course.

**SCORE.** Susan's next stop was to explore how SCORE, a U.S. Small Business Administration sponsored business mentoring program, might help.

**John Adams.** After some networking, Susan connect with John Adams. John is a business coach sponsored by Western Iowa Development Association (WIDA), Iowa Western Community College and Pottawattamie County HomeTown Competitiveness (with funding from the Iowa West Foundation). John has been coaching Susan since November of 2012. John's role was illustrated earlier in this story.

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*We want to thank Susan Kruse, Lori Holste and John Adams for their willingness to share their stories with us. We hope this story celebrates another new American entrepreneur, Susan Kruse of Dixie Moo Games, and inspires other entrepreneurs to grow local economies by growing their business dreams.*

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