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## Black Capital helps woman open gift-basket business

Lisa Haarlander | The Buffalo News | 2003-03-19  
<http://www.buffalonews.com>

Christine Castro has a vivid memory of June 27, 2002. That was the day she quit her job as catering coordinator at the Adam's Mark Hotel to focus full time on her customized gift business, Special Touches.

Castro made gift baskets and other items in her two-bedroom apartment before the ribbons, bows and tulle left little room for her children and her. With the help of an outside investor and the Black Capital Network, Castro was able to open Special Touches on Monday inside the Brisbane Building at 403 Main St. in Buffalo.

"Everybody has a vision but if you don't put it in action, you don't have anything," said Kenneth M. Quinney, a manufacturing superintendent at the Ford stamping plant in Woodlawn and an investor in Castro's business. "I believe in what she's doing. I know there's a need."

Castro met Jennifer J. Parker, president of the Black Capital Network, when Parker was working with the Adam's Mark to organize a conference last year. The organization helps minority-owned business network and market themselves. For example, Parker put a real estate company in contact with Specialty Gifts to provide baskets to clients when they move into their new homes.

Castro already has about 22 corporate clients, including the Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, and expects corporate accounts to make up about half of her business.

That's close to the national average. Corporate clients make up about 60 percent of a gift shop's revenue, said Shirley Frazier, president of Sweet Survival, a gift and gourmet consulting firm in Paterson, N.J.

Time-starved women between ages 30 and 55 who own homes are the main retail buyers of gift baskets.

"The main thing about her is she is stressed for time," Frazier said of the typical customer. "Between her family and her parents and a job, she doesn't have time to seek out a gift in a traditional mall. She wants to pick up the phone and place a call to a company that will make a gift basket to her specifications and have it delivered."

Consumers tend to spend about \$40 for a gift basket while corporations tend to average about \$75, Frazier said.

Castro sets her gift baskets apart by not wrapping them in cellophane and instead using tulle, a mesh-like fabric.

"I wanted my baskets to have a different feel and texture," she said.

Special Touches is also stocked with fresh flowers, greeting cards, chocolates and bath products. Later this week, Castro will launch a Web site where consumers can place orders online at [www.touches4u.com](http://www.touches4u.com).

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