

## Women start businesses despite recession

Many entrepreneurs say it's important to follow your gut and passion

By Sheila Burt

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Kellie Scott was a lawyer in a litigation firm in Chicago for 16 years before turning her love of home design into her full-time job. In September, she opened Divine Consign, an Oak Park store that sells used, midpriced home furnishings in good condition.

Scott said she opened the store at 111 N. Oak Park Ave. after recognizing a need for used furniture that's a cut above thrift store finds but less expensive than items sold in antique stores.

Her business exceeded expectations, and by November Scott expanded it to include another storefront a half-block away. Despite the economic downturn, Scott, is one of a growing number of area women who are opting to open their own small business - a feat not many of their mothers or grandmothers could have taken on 40 or so years ago. According to Angelika Coghlan, president of the Chicago chapter of the National Association of Women Business

Owners, membership is up this year to about 600 area women, even though starting a small business in the current economy is anything but simple. The organization connects women with other business owners through networking events and a frequently updated online message board. Because gaining access to capital through loans or other means is the "No. 1 issue that everyone is fighting for right now," networking has become more important than ever, Coghlan said Members can also learn from established women owners, who tell newcomers they can boost their survival chances if they do their research, make connections and have support.

