

## Rhode Island Monthly

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### Insider

Neighbor: Jennifer Jolicoeur

President, Athena's Home Novelties, Woonsocket; Home: North Smithfield

So many people say they never imagined a “sex toy” company could be run so professionally. The perception is we're going to be trashy or dirty. That couldn't be further from the truth. We have tastefully presented products that improve relationships. If I was dressed in leather boots and a bustier, people wouldn't take me seriously. I'm a mom. I act like a mom. I talk like a mom. People ask, “What do you tell your kids?” I tell them I help mommies and daddies stay in love forever and I help women love themselves. We blend the education and the humor to put on the perfect home party. All kinds of women come to our shows; college girls, women in their sixties, soccer moms, women in long-term relationships, single women, gay omen, bisexual women. It's a very comfortable environment.

When I decided to start my own business, the naysayers came out of the woodwork. My father said, “Don't do this; it's the biggest mistake of your life.” By the end of the third year, I had sold \$100,000 in products and I got to hear those magical three words every daughter wants to hear from her father: “I was wrong.” Now he's a big supporter and my mom works for me in accounts payable.

When we started Athena's six years ago, there were thirteen of us. Now, we have 650 people in twenty-three states. Our sales are about \$6 million annually. Athena's top-selling item is Pure Instinct Pheromone Cologne. It's a scent that leads the female to attract the male.

Two people get married, and sleep together and live together, and they can't talk to each other about sex? I want to change all that. I want people to have relationships that are fulfilling instead of being repressed. Sex is such an important natural part of the human condition, but women have been made to feel embarrassed, ashamed and confused.

Initially, people in this city weren't that interested in having a business like this. Most people thought it was raunchy. Now that they see the money the business has generated, the number of jobs and the opportunity my employees are given, I think they're saying, “Wow, she's a good businesswoman. She's got a lot of guts.”—*Pamela Berard.*