

Let the bidding begin....

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The room is filled with just about every sort of household item you can imagine.

From china cups to picture frames, from antique linens to early 20th Century arm chairs, there's literally something here to attract the attention of anyone who might walk through the door.

And walk through they do. By the hundreds, sometimes the thousands.

It's early on a Saturday morning, and this is another auction being presided over by a woman whose name has become synonymous with the trade since almost the moment she stepped out of the World Wide College of Auctioneering in Mason City, Iowa in 1997 as a certified auctioneer.

Yes, there is such a thing as a college of auctioneering.

"I had worked for other people for 27 years," says Theresa Taylor. "My family was always telling me 'You should be working for yourself.'"

These days, working for herself includes presenting private, public and charity auctions around eastern Ontario, and even involves a part-time job teaching at the college from which she graduated seven years ago.

Standing on a stage, microphone in place, Taylor seems born to do what she does.

With a confident voice, which rises and falls like it's set to music, it's not difficult to believe the owner of Theresa E. Taylor and Associates Auctioneering is a strong-willed businesswoman from way back.

"I remember working for the Standard-Freeholder when I was young," she says. "I had a paper route, and I worked hard enough to earn enough money to eventually buy a bike to help me carry the papers."

Taylor spent her formative years delivering the daily news, selling greeting cards door-to-door and doing other odd jobs to put cash in here pocket.

"I was always pretty self-sufficient," she says. "I didn't want to have to rely on other people. I wanted to do it for myself."

When she entered adulthood, Taylor found herself working for an automotive dealership, constantly coming up with ways the business could improve.

In time, she came to realize she could be using her entrepreneurial panache to strike out on her own.

"I considered for some time just what it was I wanted to do," she says. "And then I remembered all the times my family went to auctions when I was growing up."

Taylor recalls going to sales with her parents as a child, and always enjoying the experience.

"The auctions were fun," she says, "We went to them all the time, sometimes to buy things, sometimes just to see what was for sale. We would have a great time."

Taking a look around her, Taylor decided there was room in the local industry for another auctioneer, and so she enrolled in a college in Iowa.

"I spent a lot of time looking for schools, and it wasn't easy to find them," says Taylor. "But then I found World Wide and it was a perfect fit."

Encouraged by her family, Taylor registered with the school and soon found herself deep into a culture with which she could identify.

"I come from a long line of pack rats," she says. "I know what it's like to have all of these things around you, and I also understand how important it is for someone to care."

"After completing the course in Iowa, it was obvious to everyone that auctioneering and Taylor were a perfect combination.

"This is very much a people-related hob," she says. "And I am the ultimate people person. I find the good in everyone."

Within months of returning to her home in Lancaster, Taylor set up her own company and began hosting auctions around the region. The business quickly began making a name for itself, winning the Cornwall and Area Chamber of Commerce's Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2001.

"I think my background in business helped me a great deal, because I had contacts within the community," says Taylor. "And it was great to see how the community really embraced me once I started my own business."

In October of that same year, Taylor staged a bit of a coup in the local auctioneering world when she beat out a number of other firms to present for sale one of the largest personal antiques collections of late 19th-and early 20th Century in the region.

"The Foley family auction was a definite highlight of things so far," says Taylor. "That was one of our biggest auctions so far."

In fact, the auction offered more than 500 items and was held at the Cornwall Civic Complex. It drew thousands of spectators and buyers from around Ontario, Quebec and the New York State.

And last year, Taylor offered an executive home in Martintown to potential buyers, ultimately selling it for \$ 310,000.

"The owners saw the advantages of the auction method," says Taylor. "It was quite successful."

Taylor said she's entered this industry at a time when change is flowing through the world of auctioneering. With the advent of the Internet (Taylor's business also has a home on the World Wide Web), more and more people are becoming acquainted with the way auctions work.

"It's becoming very popular to buy and sell things," says Taylor. "And with the Internet, it's also easy for people to find out what things are selling for at auctions, so they know what to expect or look for when they come to an auction I'm hosting."

Taylor is now offering her experience to students attending the same college from which she graduated in 1997.

Teaching networking and marketing as an entrepreneur is one way Taylor can give back something to the industry.

"You have to pay your dues, you have to do your time," she says. "No matter how successful you might become, that never changes."

What is changing, however, is the face of auctioneering.

The number of women who are entering the industry, which has historically been dominated by men, is increasing on a daily basis.

"I would say about 10 per cent of the people going through auctioneering school right now are women, although it's definitely still a man's world," she says. "I think it's

changing though. Women are naturally good at multi-tasking, and they certainly are good at things such as remembering details and being empathetic to a person's needs."

Striving to provide the best possible experience, for both her sellers and her buyers, is a priority for Taylor.

"I want to make sure everyone enjoys themselves," says Taylor. "That's what is most important to me, that it's a good experience for all those who are involved."

Taylor says the auctions can be very emotional for people, particularly those who are selling their family's personal possessions.

"It's a portrait of someone's life that you're selling," says Taylor. "And these auctions are the last opportunity for a person to see that portrait before pieces of it belong to someone else."

As for the portrait of her life, Taylor believes she's finally showing her true self to the world.

"I should have started doing this years ago," says Taylor. "I'm very well-suited to this kind of thing, in terms of my attitude and the skills I have. It's definitely a 'me' job."