

Port Orchard Woman Hopes to Make a Killing With New Business

By Rachel Pritchett (Contact)
Monday, June 15, 2009

PORT ORCHARD —

You might say she's stabbed, shot and strangled her way into a business she says is perfect for stay-at-home moms.

Rae Walaska, 29, of Port Orchard started Murder & Mayhem: Murder Mystery Parties a few months ago and already has gone from whodunits in her home to some big-time public fundraisers.

Not bad for a Navy wife who is busy at home with a 2-year-old, who hasn't been in the area very long and who must soon leave.

That said, Walaska is focused on building her business, in which she writes customized mysteries for party-goers to solve. Themes might be pirates or the Wild West. Venues might be a restaurant, church or business.

Her dream is to grow Murder & Mayhem into a Mary Kay-style national network, where people looking to augment their family incomes can plan parties on their own schedule and with her help, wherever she is.

"I'm just really trying to make the most of the circumstances," said Walaska, who started writing murder mystery parties when she was a college student and hotel events manager in Waverly, Iowa.

Her first effort had a plot in which a famous racehorse was buried in the hotel's courtyard. Walaska, who studied business and tourism in college, presented the idea of the "Who Killed the Horse" mystery and the hotel bit. Walaska's parties were soon fueling banquet business and filling rooms.

"We had the same story every month, and I had to rewrite the ending every month," she said.

Walaska's husband, Brock, was transferred to Kitsap; then little Cade was born.

Being a stay-at-home mom got to be "a tad stir-crazy," she admitted.

Walaska began to ponder how she could replicated her success here, while taking care of Cade.

She decided to use the recession to her benefit and offer her murder mysteries to clients like restaurants to boost their customer numbers.

In February, Walaska organized an event titled "Chocolate Lovers' Die-Lite" at the Rock Steakhouse & Catering in Port Orchard. She also did a Wild West event there in April.

Owner Diane Kelly said, "Everyone seemed to have a ball," and that the events have been good for business.

Walaska has a couple of home parties under her belt now, and is working on "Sanctuary Secrets," a public fundraiser this month for the new Canterbury Care Center at a former church in Bremerton. After that comes a fundraiser for the Etta Project.

In September, Walaska will take on the planning for the Port Orchard Chamber of Commerce's Murder Mystery Weekend "Who Killed the Cap'n?"

"She's very creative," chamber director Coreen Haydock Johnson said.

Her rates vary, but the business has generated several hundred dollars a month.

Husband Brock soon will leave for Iraq. The couple is trying to sell their home, and Walaska and their young son will move back to Iowa to stay with family. When her officer husband returns, it's off to San Diego.

But wherever she is, she plans to write the scripts and plan the gruesome parties, all the while growing a business she thinks is perfect for stay-at-home moms.

Walaska has a partner, Christy Hamrick, who will help to be the local connection when Walaska is gone.

On the Web

For more information about Murder & Mayhem: Murder Mystery Parties, [click here](#).



Rae Walaska of Port Orchard peeks out of the back of her customized hearse. Walaska owns Murder & Mayhem: Murder Mystery Parties, a business in which she writes and stages whodunits. She sometimes uses the hearse as part of her mysteries. (LARRY STEAGALL | KITSAP SUN)



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