

# Startup sisters

## Conversations with three entrepreneurs

*Whether founding a business or launching a nonprofit, creating a new venture from scratch takes determination and more than a pinch of inspiration. For women in particular, making a difference is often as important as making a profit. The Philadelphia Business Journal spoke with several entrepreneurs about what it was like starting out, and how they combine their passion with what they do.*

— Valerie Rubinsky

### “The worst had already happened”

Marci Bossow Schankweiler was a lawyer before tragedy changed her life.

Before 1999, she practiced law in the Philadelphia-based firm Marshall Dennehey Warner Coleman and Goggin and at the law office of Thaddeus Mikulski in Trenton. Then her husband, Peter R. Bossow, passed away from testicular cancer at age 30.

“I realized that what was important on Sept. 1 was different than what was important to me on Aug. 30, the day that he died,” Schankweiler said.

She left her legal career and founded an organization that provides respite excursions to young adult cancer patients and their loved ones. Initially called Crossing the Finish Line, based in Blue Bell, she later renamed it For Pete’s Sake Cancer Respite Foundation.

“I had just returned to work as an attorney, and I was sitting at my desk and my cell phone was rattling with people asking me for help, and it kind of dawned on me right then that maybe it’s time for me to move to the direction of helping people,” Schankweiler recalled. “It was a Friday, I remember.”

Schankweiler said she contacted Jim Murray, one of the founders of Ronald McDonald House Charities.

“He said ‘This is it. This is your calling,’” she said.

To date, For Pete’s Sake has given the gift of quality time to more than 900 families and more than 3,600 individuals.

“I think the greatest challenge was just your own personal fear of the unknown,” Schankweiler said. “But I think for me personally, my husband had just passed away



CURT HUDSON

Marci Schankweiler of For Pete’s Sake Cancer Respite Foundation, with her staff (from left) Peg Eckert, Katie Smart, Emily Loomis and Amber Gruver.



**MARCI SCHANKWEILER**  
For Pete’s Sake  
Cancer Respite  
Foundation

### Q: When did you know you found your calling?

I don’t know if I’ve found my calling. I think that life is really a journey and that different parts of that journey happen at different times. So having found my calling, I don’t even know, I just think that being able to accept what is in front of you and the path that you’re following is the calling that you’re meant to have at the time.

### Q: What advice would you give someone who wanted to follow in your footsteps?

I always say ‘carpe diem,’ seize the day. That was what I had on my husband’s wedding ring after he died. And I always think life is really measured by the number of people that you’re able to touch on an everyday basis. And really, your relationships are what count, as long as you can build those relationships each day and you can go to bed seizing the day as best you could. To me, that is defining your personal success.

### Q: What’s the hardest part of your job?

Watching families suffer, watching them experience pain, having lived it.