

By Liz Barrett

## The Road Less Traveled

An Illinois woman finds success by putting off retirement.

WHEN PATTY SZERLONG RETIRED FROM 18 YEARS AS A tax revenue specialist, she was ready to start enjoying the stress-free years of her life. Never could she have predicted that a trip to the neighborhood spa would land her in the most rewarding position she'd ever held—as the spa's new owner.

The idea to open Artful Touch Spa ([www.artfultouchspa.com](http://www.artfultouchspa.com)) in Bloomingdale, Illinois, in 2004 was originally presented to Szerlong as a challenge. The previous spa owners had closed their doors just three months after they'd opened. She asked the shopping center's owner what was so hard about keeping a spa open and he countered with, "Well, if you think it's so easy, why don't you try it?" She did.

**DS: How did you manage the spa's project budget?**

**PS:** Luckily I have a fiscally responsible attitude. And, since all of my retirement money was going into the project, you can bet I was going to be frugal about where it was being spent.

**DS: Describe some of your best moments at the spa.**

**PS:** The first great moment was when so many people turned out to wish us well on opening day. That's when I knew that everything was going to be all right. I'm also thankful for the time we suggested to a client that he go see his doctor about a suspicious spot on his head. He returned a week later with a huge bouquet of roses and his thanks for alerting him to what turned out to be a cancerous spot, which his doctor treated successfully.

**DS: What do you think sets your spa apart?**

**PS:** We believe in pampering before profiting. We

don't charge for add-ons like a microdermabrasion hand treatment with hand massage during a mask treatment. These are things that don't cost us much but mean a lot to our clients.

**DS: Describe one of your retailing methods.**

**PS:** We apply a collagen treatment to clients' skin at no extra charge while explaining the benefits. We then let them know that the product is available at the front counter if they're interested in purchasing it. The doctor on staff has also developed a wonderful skin moisturizer that my female clients are crazy about—it sells like hotcakes! Whether or not the clients buy the products, they love the pampering they receive, and that's the most important thing to me.



Owner, Patty Szerlong



**DS: Do you have any plans to expand the spa?**

**PS:** Just recently I got word that a day spa in the area is closing. So I hired some of their former employees and spoke to my painter and carpenter this morning about building three more treatment rooms. With the new rooms, additional em-

ployees and the other spa's clients, I'm hoping to double my business in the next six months.

**DS: What will you do with the spa when you really retire?**

**PS:** Candy, my massage therapist, tells me that five years from now she's going to want to buy the business, so I need to stop spending so much money now. We both laugh about this now, but maybe someday I'll be working for her (on a very part-time basis)! ●



Are you practicing Winning Ways at your spa—with the results to prove it? We want to hear about it! Contact us with your story at [lbarrett@creativeage.com](mailto:lbarrett@creativeage.com).