

Women

Mean

Business

OCTOBER IS
WOMEN'S
SMALL
BUSINESS
MONTH

The News-Gazette celebrates women-owned businesses and their lasting impact on the economy.

In 1972, there were a little over 400,000 women-owned businesses in the United States. Until 1988, women needed a male relative to co-sign if they wanted to apply for a business loan. That same year, the Women's Business Ownership Act increased The Small Business Administration's access to capital to provide financial assistance to organizations geared toward women-owned small businesses. By 2019, women-owned businesses represented 42% of all U.S. businesses and generated \$1.9 trillion worth of revenue. Today, there are over 13 million women-owned businesses and counting. Every October, SBA honors the milestone achievements of today's women-owned businesses.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is celebrating National Women's Business Month throughout October by recognizing the significant contributions of women-owned businesses throughout the state.

"Women are vital to the health and future of our state's economy – not just on the sidelines, but at the helm of businesses that are enhancing our communities and building wealth that will have a ripple effect on generations to come," said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton.



The News-Gazette®

WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

SPHERION STAFFING AND RECRUITING

'I GENUINELY WANT TO HELP'

Franchise owner Cindy Somers finds community involvement is integral to success

By KEVIN BARLOW
news@news-gazette.com

SAVOY — As pleasing as it is to help an area resident find work, that's not what makes Cindy Somers smile most.

"I love working with adults and helping them find jobs, and I love working with employers and helping them find the people that they need," said the franchise owner of Spherion Staffing and Recruiting, a recruitment and staffing company in Savoy.

"But I participate in the 'iRead iCount' program with the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce and the schools. I go in once a week and do something like count with the kindergartners. If that doesn't bring a smile to your face, I don't know what would. It's very entertaining."

Somers understands that being successful isn't about staying in the office all day working.

Spherion is based on a concept of driving careers and growing businesses. Its goal is to match good, hardworking people with successful businesses in Champaign-Urbana, Savoy and the surrounding communities. Somers also owns franchises in Macon and Vermilion counties.

Being involved in the community is in Somers' DNA. Her mother and father, Barbara and Penn Nelson, got involved in the community as soon as they moved to Champaign in 1968. Penn worked in the clothing business for 18 years and even had the task of measuring the University of Illinois basketball team for custom-tailored blazers during the Harv Schmidt era, then later, for Illinois football coach Bob Blackman.

In 1981, he was approached and accepted the opportunity to open a Norrell, now Spheri-



Robin Scholz photos/The News-Gazette

Cindy Somers in her office at Spherion Staffing and Recruiting in Savoy.

They're in charge

This story appeared in Central Illinois Business Magazine, part of a year-long series on women-owned local businesses. To subscribe, visit news-gazette.com.

a member of the Foundation Board for the Don Moyer Boys & Girls Club, where he was also a longtime board member; a member of the Champaign Parks Foundation Board; chairman of the United Way Campaign in 2002; and as a lifetime member of the Optimist Club and Phi Gamma Delta.

"I love being involved in the community," said his daughter, who has won numerous community involvement awards, including a Community Impact award in 2011, the 2012 Athena Award, the 2014 Spirit of Carving honor from the United Way and the 2018 Entrepreneurial Excellence Management from Innovation Celebration.

She has mentored with the C-U One-to-One Mentoring Program and is active in the Champaign West Rotary Club, the United Way board of directors and the C-U Junior Women's Club.



Clockwise from bottom, Cindy Somers, franchisee; and recruiters Sherice Lotts, Susan Pulliam and Laura Del Rossi at Spherion.

on, staffing franchise. Penn became her business role model for a variety of reasons.

"He was an entrepreneur but a very hard-worker," she said. "It didn't come easy, but he never gave up. In the end, he made a difference in so many people's lives, and that's all that matters."

Her plan was to stay for 10 years and then move on. But in 1999, she became partners

with her father. In 2009, he retired and she took over, but he still had an office for a time at the headquarters.

He died in May 2019. "It has been an interesting couple of years," Somers said. "First, my father passed and then the following year, COVID hits. I think we are all just now getting back to normal, but I think the pandemic has changed the mind-sets of a lot of people. I think a lot of people's ideas and ideals have re-prioritized."

Somers said she leans on her contacts from the corporate offices for assistance.

"Technology keeps changing," she said. "Before, if we were recruiting, we would place an ad in The News-Gazette and get the candidates we were looking for. But now you have to go to people where they are at, and we have found that they are on their phones. Now, it may take a TikTok video to catch someone's attention."

She also credits her staff for the firm's success.

"I have a wonderful staff, and they know what they are doing, and that allows me the time and opportunity to volunteer and help others," she said.

Adapting with the changes is a necessity to staying successful. So is being involved with the community, Somers said. But she credits one more reason for her success.

"You have to be genuine," she said. "I genuinely want to help people find jobs. I genuinely want to help companies find good employees, and I genuinely want to be involved with the community."

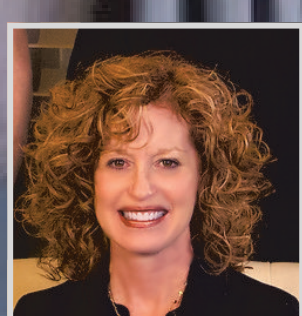
"Yes, it's nice to make a decent living and enjoy things, but it's not about the money. That's not why we do what we do. It's about making our community better and our residents happier."



20 Years in Business & Woman Owned

- Commercial Applications
- Blinds, Shutters & Shades
- Drapery & Soft Fashions
- Custom Bedding
- Custom Furniture & Upholstery

Stop by to learn more about our Fall Savings!



Le Ann Meyer
Designer/Owner



Roy Meyer
Installer/Owner



Suzanne Alexander
Designer

217-359-8710 | www.draperiesandinteriors.net
1804A Woodfield Dr., Savoy, IL

WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

ILLINI FIRE EQUIPMENT

RUNNING THE FAMILY BUSINESS

By KEVIN BARLOW
news@news-gazette.com

URBANA — All businesses change over the years. New technology, the ways in which products and services are delivered and the demand for those services and products are fluid and normally not constant.

But not much change has occurred in the fire-protection business, says Amy Lewis, president of Illini Fire Equipment in Urbana.

“Our main priority is to ensure a fire goes out, and that will never change,” Lewis said. “But the fire extinguisher of today is similar to the fire extinguisher of 20 years ago. There is not really any new technology coming into play. It’s really a low-tech type of industry.

“It’s not like we are going digital or electronic. It’s a mechanical type of world, but keeping and finding people that have an interest can be somewhat challenging.”

Illini Fire Equipment was founded in 1957 by Walter and Dorothy Carlson.

They owned and managed the business for over 30 years. Then their daughter and son-in-law, Janet and Harold Scharlau, took over ownership and management of the business in 1990. As a youngster, Amy did odd jobs for her grandparents and later for her parents when they owned the business.

But Amy was busy as a student at St. Joseph-Ogden High School. She was more interested in softball than fire service. She was named the 1991 News-Gazette All-Area Softball Player of the Year and, four years later, was a first-team Academic All-American at Northern Illinois.

It was there that she took a class on financial accounting, and the interest in running her own business took shape. After college, she began working at public accounting firms, helping other businesses.

But when the Scharlaus re-



Amy Lewis, president of Illini Fire Equipment in Urbana, stands in the company workshop.

Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

tired in 2015, Amy began managing Illini Fire Equipment.

“When my dad stepped away, there was a void there, and I was ready for a change from my situation at the time,” she said. “I just moved right in, and it seemed like a perfect fit.”

There was much to learn, she said.

“Obviously, you learn things as you go along, but there are not a lot of businesses in the fire-protection service industry,” she said. “I can probably tell you every other fire-service business in a 100-mile radius, and we refer business to each other. It’s a small, specialty-contractor-type service.”

Illini Fire Service specializes in the sale and service of fire-protection equipment. Over the years, the company has built a strong reputation in the industry because of customer service and responsiveness, Lewis said.

Illini Fire Equipment main-

tains its primary location in Urbana. As the company has grown, it has expanded with two additional physical locations. In addition to Urbana, there are also facilities in Bloomington and Robinson.

“We were approached by some friendly competitors in the Mattoon area, and they were a mom-and-pop-run business but wanted to retire,” she said. “They also wanted the company to survive and have that feel of a family-oriented business. It was a big risk but turned out to be a great decision, and it doubled our size and expanded our service area.

“It was a great decision, but it comes down to the people who are in this business. We have a bond with each other, with our employees and with our customers, and that family left the business, but their customers remained satisfied.”

All technicians meet the licensing requirements required by the Officer of the Il-



JOY

LAU

At news-gazette.com



To read more about dozens of local women leaders — including Parkland College President **Pam Lau** and the city of Champaign’s **Rachel Joy** — check out our Beyond the Boardroom archive at news-gazette.com.

linois State Fire Marshal.

“We have a lot of employees who have been here a long time,” she said. “They remain a good resource and support

foundation. They made it easy when I started and still make it easy today.

“We treat our customers and our employees well, and we have been doing that since 1957. I think if you ask any of them, they will agree. Many of our employees have been here for more than 20 years, and I think that says something about our company as well.”

And, Lewis admits, sometimes she can feel out of place.

“When I go to conferences, about 95 percent of the others that are there are male,” she said. “So it’s definitely a male-oriented business. We have one female technician though, and she has been with us for a while.

“But, just in the course of running a business, it’s just like running any other business. You deal with people. You deal with numbers, and you try to do your best to provide for your customers and your employees.”

STYLE AND grace
SALON & DAY SPA



Style and Grace Salon & Spa is a full service, locally and woman owned salon located in Southwest Champaign, at 3006 Crossing Ct., offering hair, skincare, massage, and nail services. Tracy Brucks has now been the proud owner since 2018, when she purchased the salon that she worked in for over 21 years. Tracy’s vision for Style and Grace is to be positioned as a professional salon with a welcoming, engaging team who provides exceptional service that will leave you feeling pampered and well cared for.

Over time, we’ve been able to grow – gaining new staff members and offering new products and services. Even during COVID, we were able to create jobs and continue to hire and add to the Style and Grace Family. Our salon is continually growing and prospering and working hard every day to connect more and more with our community. We strongly believe we provide the best experience, which is why our staff is constantly educated to be able to offer the most up to date services to our clients. We offer superior services by a highly trained and personable team who values every individual, we strike the perfect balance of Style and Grace.



Visit our website, www.styleandgracecu.com, to see a complete list of the amazing services we have to offer and get to know our friendly team! To make appointments or purchase gift cards, download our mobile app, visit our website, or call (217)355-0505.

Pictured (from left to right): Tracy Brucks - Owner, Laura Whalen - Retail Director also Recruiting Coordinator, Ranada Burton - General Manager, Mahala Kneller - Assistant Manager

WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

BELTONE HEARING AID SERVICE

WHEN CUSTOMERS NEED HELP, SHE'S ALL EARS

By DAVE HINTON

dhinton@news-gazette.com

CHAMPAIGN — One thing stands out about Beltone hearing specialist Bekki Ramirez's job.

"I love the looks on people's faces when they can hear again," she said. "I never get bored with it."

Ramirez is co-owner, with her sister, Jennifer Thompson, of five Beltone hearing-aid outlets in Bradley, Champaign, Danville, Champaign, Rantoul and Watseka.

Ramirez alternates between the Danville and Champaign stores, while Thompson is in each one during the week.

Working with Beltone is a family tradition handed down from their parents, who started owning stores in 1968 and moved the family from Springfield to Champaign for their

first outlet. They went on to own several Beltone stores in Illinois and Indiana.

Ramirez is glad she made the decision to get into the business.

"I've only had three jobs in my life," she said. "The first thing was working at Ponderosa (Steakhouse) in high school. And then I went to CNA classes and became an aide in a nursing home for a short period."

"My dad said, 'How long are you going to do that?' I came here, and I was his computer person when computers came out, and I learned the business."

That was about 40 years ago, the 60-year-old Ramirez said.

She is a Beltone believer and said there is a reason the company has so many loyal customers.

"I think mainly just the service," she said. "We don't just sell you a hearing aid. We're

there for the whole time to help them hear the best they can.

"We stick close to the customers, and they become like our family. We see them every four months" for exams and to determine if updates are needed, she said. "Beltone's always been known for our service."

There are cheaper hearing aids on the market, and Ramirez said there is a place for those, noting they are made for people who are just beginning to experience hearing issues.

"They're rechargeable, and they don't last very long," she said. "I've had people come in with just a mild hearing problem. I tell them just need over-the-counter hearing aids. It's just a crutch to get them better."

Ramirez said there are three primary reasons for hearing loss: age, high noise and heredity.



Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

Bekki Ramirez at Beltone Hearing Aid Service in Champaign.

Not as many people suffer from noise-induced hearing loss as in the past, at least in Ramirez's experience. She said more people are wearing ear protection.

Ramirez used to see many customers who worked for General Motors' former plant in Tilton who came in with hearing issues. Years ago, more farmers had hearing problems from high noise, but tractor and combine cabs are so quiet now that

that is not as much of an issue, Ramirez said.

Noise-induced problems now are generally experienced by people shooting guns or not wearing ear protection at work.

"Once you reach the age of 50, you should have a baseline test done so there's a record, and then we recommend a test every two years after that," Ramirez said.

Exams generally take about 15 minutes for those without hearing issues and about 90 minutes for those who do.

It generally takes about a week for hearing aids to arrive unless the store has them in stock.

It doesn't appear the Ramirez-and-Thompson-owned Beltone operation will remain in the family after they retire. No one in their family appears eager to enter the hearing-aid business.

Support Your Local Businesses



120 W. Main Street Urbana • Hours: 10a-5p Wed-Sat

217-367-3711

Cinemagallery.cc



Carolyn Baxley opened Cinema Gallery in the former Urbana Cinema in January 2001.

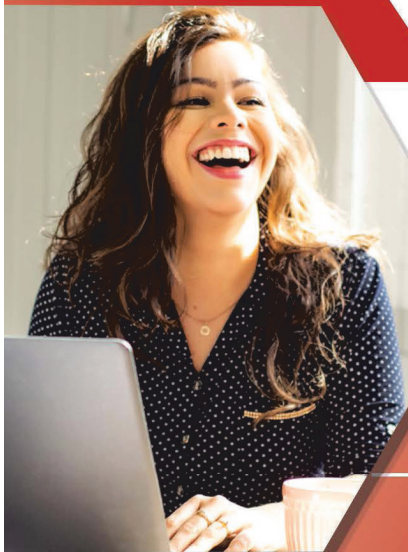
She represents 52 artists of the Midwest with emphasis on those who have connections to Urbana-Champaign.

Media on display include ceramics, glass, sculpture, paintings, prints, and studio furniture.



Adecco

better work, better life



TAKE THE NEXT STEP IN YOUR CAREER TODAY.

About Us

Services Offered

For over 30 years, Adecco has been the leading staffing agency in Central Illinois, serving communities such as Champaign, Urbana, Bloomington, Normal, Hoopston, Rantoul, Danville and many more!

- Temporary
- Temp-to-Hire
- Direct Hire

Industries We Specialize In

- Clerical/Administrative
- Finance & Accounting
- Hospitality
- Information Technology
- Light Industrial
- Manufacturing
- Professional
- Retail
- Warehouse

Part-time and Full-time positions are available with benefits!

Visit adeccousa.com to APPLY today, scan the QR code to the right or text/call (217) 355-2342



Adecco



better work, better life

Adecco Staffing is owned by LaMae Ryan, Franchise Owner in Central, IL. Adecco Staffing is the world's leading workforce solutions provider, with over 5,100 branches and offices in 60+ countries worldwide. Backed by a global network of over 10,000 recruiters, Adecco offers staffing services, recruiting, talent development, assessment and managed services across all industries and professional levels.

With a strong presence in Champaign County, McLean County, and Vermilion County, we have access to qualified local talent and the recruiting capabilities to quickly connect you with top candidates for your roles. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss your hiring needs and how we can supply the talent your organization requires.

Our experienced recruiters can save you time and money by handling every aspect of screening, assessing, and evaluating qualified candidates local to your area. We interview, test skills, verify backgrounds, and check references so you only see the best applicants ready to work.



WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

APPLIED PAVEMENT TECHNOLOGY INC.

CEMENTING HER LEGACY

By KEVIN BARLOW
news@news-gazette.com

URBANA — Not everybody grows up wanting to work with pavements and bridges.

“It is an underappreciated line of work,” said Katie Zimmerman, founder and executive president of Applied Pavement Technology Inc., a specialty civil-engineering firm based in Urbana. “People don’t usually grow up thinking about a career in transportation, but once you get into it, you realize how many different types of things you can work on.”

“You can be very technical. You can get into the newest technology. You can get into environmental issues. It is more than just concrete and asphalt, and it encompasses so many different aspects.”

Zimmerman has earned an international reputation for her work in the use of asset-management programs for pavements, bridges and ancillary assets to improve transportation agency decisions.

After enrolling at the University of Illinois in engineering, Zimmerman attended an open house for the department.

“I found that civil engineering was the most people-oriented of all of the discipline within the engineering community,” she said. “I started out as an undergrad in the structures program, but I discovered that transportation provided more of an opportunity. It resonated with me.”

During her career, she has helped agencies determine their needs; assisted companies with using asset data for planning, programming, budgeting and investment decisions; and improve agency and accountability. She is starting to step



Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

Katie Zimmerman, former owner of Applied Pavement Technology Inc., works at her home in Urbana.

back from her career, a little at a time.

“I started the company and was president for a long time,” she said. “But we decided we wanted to do an internal transition. There were three principal owners that helped found the company and we transitioned, sold off our stock to the next generation, and transitioned out of leadership positions. We have been doing that for four years. The company continues to grow and continues to be profitable, and things are looking very good for everyone.”

Zimmerman is a licensed engineer and received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in civil engineering from Illinois.

Running a business as a woman can be a challenge, she says.

“But if you are good at what you do and keep up with the latest technology, you understand that you are helping people,” she said. “Everybody needs and uses transportation, and many don’t even think about it.”

Zimmerman has served in a leadership position for several professional organizations, including

as the current chair of the Transportation Research Board’s Transportation Asset Management Committee and chair of its Pavement Management Systems Committee from 1994 to 2000.

She was a member of the UI Civil and Environmental Engineering Alumni Board and served as president from 2002-04. Zimmerman has been recognized by the National Highway Institute with the Team Administrative Award in 2007 and ‘08 and received the Young Alumni Civil Engineer Achievement Award from the UI Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in 1992.

Another thing about transportation, she says, is that there will always be a need for the industry.

“As for the future, I see lots of changes coming,” she said. “Technology is certainly making changes in transportation, certainly in the types of vehicles we will be using, the pavements we will be driving on, and the roads we will be taking to get to our destinations. It’s also about how your planes will fly and the railroad industry. So many things are changing quickly.”



Women’s Small Business Month



Tanna Suits
Insurance Agent
426 E Champaign Ave
Rantoul, IL 61866-3004
www.countryfinancial.com/tanna.suits
tanna.suits@countryfinancial.com
(217)892-4479

Insurance and Financial Services

“COUNTRY Financial®” is the marketing name for the COUNTRY Financial family of affiliated companies (collectively, “COUNTRY”), which include COUNTRY Life Insurance Company®, COUNTRY Mutual Insurance Company®, and their respective subsidiaries, located in Bloomington, IL.

1020-578HC_28669-11/8/2022



Reifsteck Reid offers architectural, interior design, and construction observation services. They specialize in projects for educational facilities both in higher education and secondary education, research facilities, religious facilities, financial institutions, municipalities, restaurants, and single family, multi-family, and fraternity and sorority housing. They also offer services in LEED documentation, owner’s representation, and environmental graphics.

Reifsteck Reid & Company Architects have a reputation of responsiveness, fairness, and collaboration, and build and maintain long-term relationships by listening to their clients’ needs and consistently exceeding expectations. The firm continues as a partner during construction and remains a resource long after a project’s completion.

Their skill in core areas leads to on-budget delivery and our extensive experience is valuable in planning, prioritizing, and phasing projects.

Founded in 1985, and known as Gorski Reifsteck since 1991, Elsa Reifsteck, Bridgett Wakefield, Jhane Reifsteck, and Kristen Fanning became owners of Reifsteck Reid & Company Architects in January 2022 and Reifsteck Reid became a certified WBE in the State of Illinois in November 2022.



Reifsteck Reid offers architectural, interior design, and construction management services. They specialize in projects for educational facilities (higher ed and secondary ed), research facilities, religious facilities, financial institutions, municipalities, restaurants, and housing (single-family, multi-family, fraternities/sororities).



217-351-4100 | rr-arch.com
909 Arrow Road, Suite 4, Champaign, IL

WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

MONYOK LEADERSHIP

BUILDING BETTER BOSSES

By **DAVE HINTON**
dhinton@news-gazette.com

DANVILLE — People in lofty positions may have skills to operate a company, but leading human beings can be like herding cats.

That's one area where Annie Monyok, owner of Monyok Leadership, can help.

CEOs, executive directors, shop or shift supervisors "call and say, 'I feel a little crazy right now. I don't know what to do with this employee,'" Monyok said. "That's where the coaching comes into place."

Monyok-led training is designed to help people solve some of the problems themselves so they feel more confident in their abilities.

"It's designed to give people hard skills for leading in those roles," Monyok said.

The most common thing Monyok has leaders work through is interpersonal issues with an employee, providing a strategy on how to lead an employee or rebuild a relationship.

One thing to realize: Every employee is different, Monyok said. Some people need a lot of pressure to get things done; others need a lot of space. And then there are others who are somewhere in between.

The workplace dynamic can be a war zone of the generations. Those of Generation Z (born in the late 1990s to late 2000s) are not necessarily more difficult to work with, but they tend to be more vocal about what they need to be comfortable, Monyok said.

Meanwhile, Baby Boomers, who are starting to retire, are more observant of the workplace hierarchy and might be

less inclined to tell their higher-ups, "This is what I need to be successful."

"It's not necessarily wrong; it's just different," Monyok said. "I think it's important for people to ask for what they need. It's learning to understand what motivates Gen Z differently than the Boomer generation."

Monyok, a Catlin native who continues to live in that community, coaches/teaches clients in small business, but primarily works with manufacturing, non-profits and municipalities.

Coaching, consulting and training are her bailiwick.

Among her offerings is a Leadership Out Loud class for first-time leaders who want to learn how to set expectations and keep people accountable.

"I try to focus on the client and their organizational need,"



Monyok Leadership founder Annie Monyok conducts a workshop at Fischer Theatre in downtown Danville.

she said.

Monyok's background included working for an automotive manufacturer in Danville for 12 years before she branched out on her own.

"I lived in this (human resources) realm and spent a lot of time supporting these types of endeavors," Monyok said.

"Somewhere along the way, I came across the tools for coaching leaders," and went to school for that.

She realized, "I can do this as a job" and built her client base while working at her other job.

"I didn't set out to be a consultant," Monyok said. "That happened along the way."

the CU flower house

- Woman Owned
- Locally Owned
- Houses Local Women Artists
- Co-Op Space for Small Women Owned Businesses

Florist - Event Space - Bakery - Co-Op - Event Rentals

2006 S. Neil Street
Champaign IL 61280
thecuflowerhouse.com
217-419-1774



the CU flower house by A. Hunt Design

"The CU Flower House is owned by Andrea Hunt, a Champaign, Illinois native.

Andrea brought her 9-year-old business home to Champaign to open her dream Flower Shop. A multi-functional space that inspired not only clients and customers but also fellow women-owned small businesses to think outside of the box when it came to design and how a business could be run.

The CU Flower House operates as a cooperative type of environment where small businesses run their business out of it. Shared space, shared advertising, shared POS system, shared responsibility. The companies help promote and support each other knowing and selling each other's products.

2006 S. Neil Street is home to a florist, A. Hunt Design; a bakery, Hunny Bunny Bakes; a calligrapher, Apricity Ink; a balloon and backdrop artist, Luxe Balloons and Backdrops; Event Coordinator, Kelly Nelson Events; and a laser printer, Kensington Cuts.

The CU Flower House also carries primarily women-owned artists and their goods. Secret Garden CU, Delight Flower Farm, Daisy Moon, Soapologist, Feral Florals, Leslie Kimball Art, Firedoll Studios, The Silver Acre and more! The CU Flower House is a one-stop shop for all your floral, bakery, and gifting needs ALL run and owned by local women entrepreneurs!"



Follow Us on Facebook for Menu Updates!

NAMKEN NUTRITION

CONSULTING & MEAL PREP

Now open at 2740 S. Philo Rd in Urbana!

Offering healthy meals to-go and nutrition consulting with a registered dietitian.

Namken Nutrition is a dietitian-owned, small business based out of Decatur, IL that recently expanded to the Champaign-Urbana area earlier this summer.

Namken Nutrition offers fully-prepared, heat-and-eat meals, smoothies, coffees, breakfast items, and protein snacks. Meals can be preordered on our website at www.namkennutrition.com or you may walk-in and purchase items from the grab 'n go cooler (grocery store style) any time during business hours. In addition to food, Namken Nutrition offers one-on-one nutrition consulting with a registered dietitian.

Hours

Monday: 7am-4pm Friday: 7am-2pm
 Tuesday: 7am-4pm Saturday: Closed
 Wednesday: 7am-6pm Sunday: 9am-1pm
 Thursday: 7am-4pm

