
Maxine Clark

Build-A-Bear Workshop®

By M. Karen Hubbard

Maxine Clark has had a very successful business career. She spent nineteen years working in several different divisions of the May Department Stores Company in St. Louis, Missouri. In the early 1990's, she was the president of Payless Shoes and lead the company to become one of the top providers of licensed footwear for children in the country. Most people would likely be satisfied with that job, but not Maxine.

Her entrepreneurial spirit led her to create her own unique retail store. Clark took 80% of her \$750,000 personal savings to develop the Build-A-Bear Workshop® concept with the assistance of many advisors, i.e., artwork, employee costumes, store design, and company logo. It cost between \$500,000 to \$700,000 to open the first store in 1997 in the St. Louis Galleria Mall. Yearly sales per store were estimated at \$2 million so Clark was able to find investment for expansion from other business investors because the investors could see how popular her stores were going to be. In 2001, Build-A-Bear Workshop® was named the Retail Innovator of the Year (someone who introduces new products to consumers) by the National Retail Federation. Build-A-Bear Workshop® earned \$474 million in sales, world-wide, by the end of 2008.

As of 2009, worldwide, Maxine has more than 400 Build-A-Bear Workshops® stores in 46 states and Canada and 30 franchised stores in global locations around the world such as United Kingdom, Ireland, Tokyo (Japan), Australia, Denmark, South Korea, France, and Taiwan. (Franchised stores are ones which Clark sold licenses to other people so they had permission to sell her product.) She now has a store in New York City on Fifth Avenue. Even though Build-A-Bear Workshop® is already a great achievement for just one person, Maxine has not stopped there. She continues to expand the retail store as much as she can. The business is expanding outside of malls and going to new types of locations. She has started the "Make Your Own Mascot" stores located in baseball parks located in Philadelphia, Cleveland, Cincinnati, San Francisco, and St. Louis. There is also a Build-A-Bear Workshop® store in the St. Louis Zoo and the St. Louis Science Center. Bear sized gear can be bought for NASCAR®, MLB®, NBA®, WNBA®, NFL®, and NHL®. The Build A Bear Workshop® has also been licensed to sell Tiny Tee® shirts with college and university emblems on them.

The Build-A-Bear Workshop Foundation™ is committed to helping communities and lives through meaningful programs that support causes for children and families. The Foundation supports a number of programs through the sale of purple satin hearts, available for \$1 in all the stores. One of the programs, Stuffed with Hugs™, is in its eighth year and helps children in need around the world by giving teddy bears to children's causes. The program has given more than 325,000 teddy bears to children.

In 2004, the Huggable Heroes® program was started to honor young people who have helped their own neighborhoods, schools, and communities. The program tries to encourage children to make a change in their communities. Young people are nominated and those selected receive a donation to their program.

The Build-A-Bear Workshop Bear Hugs Foundation™ is supported by the sales of special animals in the stores. In 2006, part of the proceeds from the sale of Champ-A Champion Fur Kids raised funds to help children's health and wellness issues, including pediatric cancer, juvenile diabetes and autism. Some of the money from the purchase of Read Teddy® helps support the First Book organization which gives new books to low-income families. The sale of Bearemy's Kennel Pals®, a line of dogs, supports domestic pet programs and helps fund animals in crisis situations. Since 2000, Build-A-Bear Workshop® has donated over \$1 million (US) to the World Wildlife Fund through the sales of its WWF Collectibear® stuffed animal series. One dollar from each plush animal sold goes to WWF® to conserve and protect animals around the world.

Maxine Clark has been a success in the past, and her skills as an entrepreneur will guarantee her continued success in the future. She is not going to let anything stop her.