community development partnership

Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower and Outer Cape

A Spirit of Persistence: Janell Brown's Journey with the CDP

""CDP sees people, not just numbers. They see your vision."

– Janell Brown, Owner Sol Spa, Chatham



If there's one word that defines Janell Brown, it's persistence.

A 14th-generation Cape Codder, she grew up in Harwich with what she calls "salt in my veins." After graduating from UMass Amherst as a pre-med major, she imagined a future off Cape. But when her mother passed away during her junior year, that plan shifted. As the oldest of four siblings — the youngest only five years old — she came home.

"I thought I'd head west," she says. "But I needed to come back. My family needed me."

That return shaped everything that followed.

By 1997, Janell began building her massage therapy practice on Cape Cod, piecing together multiple jobs while steadily growing a client base. She waitressed, substitute taught and offered discounted massages to get started.

In 2000, inspired by her mother's experience with cancer, she founded **The SHE Foundation** — short for Sea, Heaven & Earth — offering holistic services to women undergoing treatment. When a sharp rent increase forced the foundation to close after its first year, she faced a decision.

Rather than step back, she leaned forward.

In 2002, with $15,000 in borrowed capital, she opened Sol Spa in Chatham. Over the next two decades, Sol Spa grew, downsized, relocated, and evolved.

"I was building the plane while flying it," she says.

At the same time, her life outside the spa was evolving, too. As her business grew, so did her responsibilities at home — and sustainability became more than a business goal.

In 2019, an unexpected opportunity arose. The owner of the unit next door — a respected local businessman who had known Janell's mother — offered to sell her the space and hold the mortgage himself.

"It was a gift," she says. "He believed in me."

To renovate and expand, Janell secured a $30,000 microloan from the CDP.

She signed the loan just days before the COVID-19 shutdown.

As uncertainty rippled through small businesses across the Cape, CDP restructured Janell's loan, extending the terms and providing flexibility during the pandemic.

"CDP sees people, not just numbers," Janell says. "They see your vision."

Today, that investment is visible the moment you walk through the door. The spa reflects her creative spirit: rich colors, abundant plants, and a warm, welcoming atmosphere. "It's not the typical white-robe spa," she says. "It's very me."

CDP Director of Business & Credit Programs, Pam Andersen, sees that resilience firsthand. Janell's long-term commitment to her business and her community reflects exactly the kind of entrepreneur the CDP strives to support.

"She's deeply committed," Andersen says. "Our role is to walk alongside business owners like her to help them keep moving forward."

That partnership, along with regular check-ins and practical guidance, helped Janell stabilize and ultimately repay her loan.

Staying Power

Like many entrepreneurs, Janell's journey hasn't been linear. Instead, she continues to adapt. "You have to keep going," she says. "You figure it out."

More than twenty years after opening its doors, Sol Spa continues to serve clients in Chatham. In addition to massage therapy, Janell is now exploring the launch of a new bodywork school, blending decades of experience with a desire to mentor the next generation.

Janell's story is a reminder that when persistence meets partnership, small businesses can endure. Through flexible financing and consistent support, the CDP helps make that staying power possible.

SOL SPA

Visit Sol Spa in Chatham or learn more at:
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