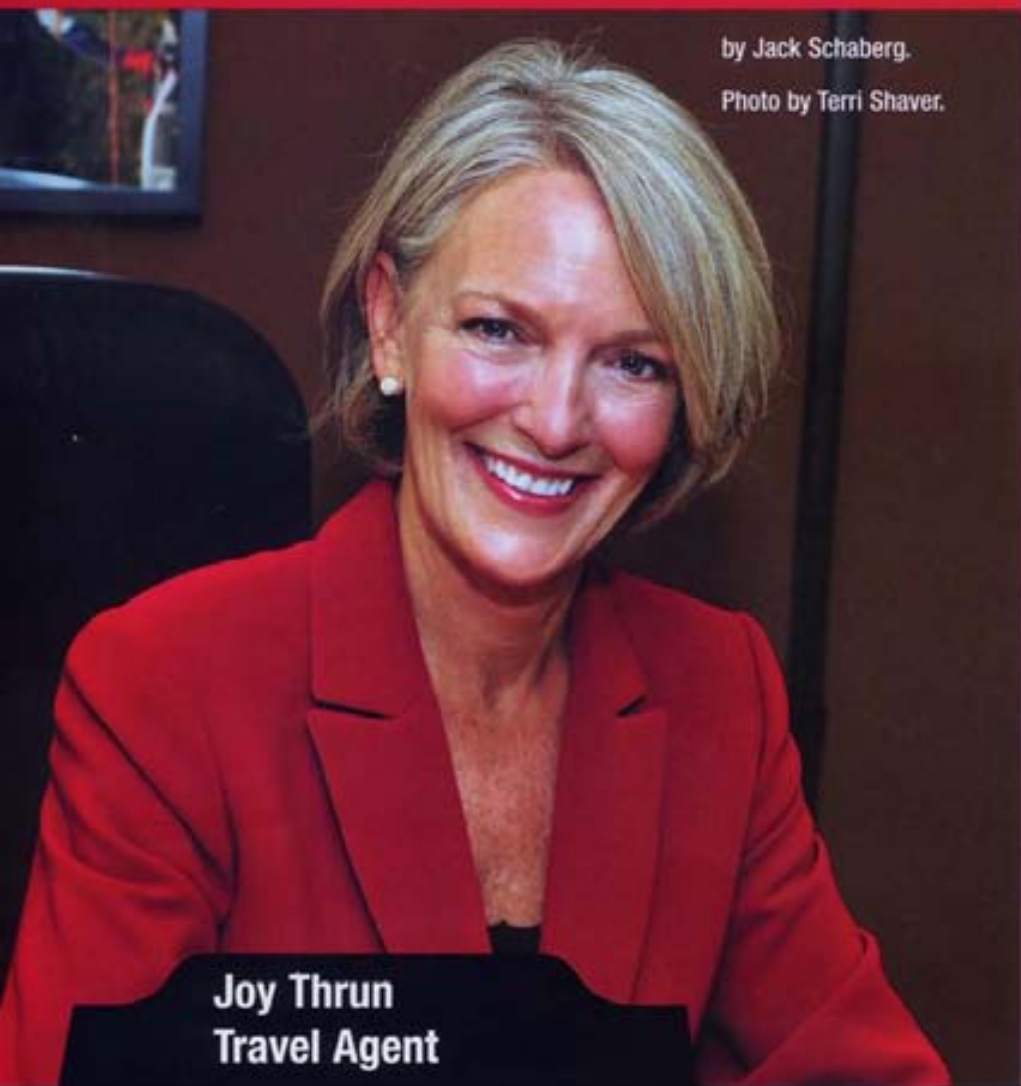


A Classy and Classic Travel Agent

by Jack Schaberg.

Photo by Terri Shaver.



Joy Thrun Travel Agent

Name: Joy Thrun

Position: Owner / President

Company: Classic Travel

Years in Business:

Opened Classic Travel on May 1, 1980. Has been in the travel industry over 35 years.

Years in Lansing area:

35+ years.

Education: Variety of college courses with a focus on business, at Oakland Community College, Lansing Community College, Michigan State University. Teacher at LCC and Davenport University.

Family: Husband, Tom, also in the travel business. Four brothers and sisters, and large extended family.

Bruce Springsteen was born to run; Pele was born to play soccer; Joy Thrun, it seems, was born to be a travel agent. How else can one explain a career that began in high school and continues to bring her such unmitigated pleasure? Spend a few minutes with the owner of Classic Travel in Okemos, and you may find yourself with a sudden urge to run home, find your passport, pack your bags and head to the airport.

Q: How long have you been involved in the travel business?

A: I took my senior [high school] trip to the Bahamas and was just like, "I gotta do this." I had this burning desire to travel the world... and it seemed like the most logical thing; it seemed like a great way to spend your career, selling travel; so I talked my way into a co-op travel position at AAA while still in high school... and I've always had travel jobs.

Q: Where did you work before opening Classic Travel?

A: I worked at Tiffany Travel, which doesn't exist anymore. I also worked for Spartan Travel. I've done travel all my life.

Q: What makes your travel agency different from others?

A: Because I'm a working owner with 28 years of seeing trends and working with terrific clients, I think it's really experience...and a strong image. It's my belief that most businesses fail because they don't have an image. We have the image of professionalism that you don't see in a lot of businesses, especially travel businesses. If you think about it like a team and I'm the coach, you have a coach that's still playing. So I understand what my staff's jobs are

like, and I make sure everybody embraces the fact that the customer comes first. People really want service, especially as it pertains to travel. They want someone they can contact.

Q: Do you still travel a lot?

A: I travel more now than 10 years ago, and primarily because a big part of our business is escorting groups. We do a lot of large association groups and incentives, and those groups like to have an escort. My feeling is that they want to have the most experienced person. From January until now [late April], I've traveled almost every two weeks.

Q: What trends have you noticed in your industry?

A: Since September 11, it's fascinating how much more people are traveling. I haven't been on a flight lately where there's more than one empty seat. People really realized how valuable it is to travel, and you're seeing that people are spending their discretionary money, or borrowing, to travel.

You're seeing people doing things that are a little more adventurous. One of the biggest growing adventure markets is hiking and biking. Also, family travel. For special occasions, anniversaries, birthdays, and so forth—people taking their whole family on trips. The other big trend is in all-inclusive vacations, where you could walk into [the resort] with five dollars in your pocket and walk out with it.

Q: What do you say to companies who don't use a travel agent?

A: A lot of companies have their employees booking on the Internet, because they think they don't have to pay fees, or their employees say it's easier. But I think there's a real sig-

nificant change in that. The business community should [know that] Expedia and Travelocity charge fees now, which are somewhat equivalent [to ours]. But if someone gets stuck in a hurricane or snowstorm, you can call [us] and say, "Hey, can you help me out?" And that is really significant to the business traveler.

Secondly, if [your employees] are booking online, you're paying them whatever their per hour rate is to hack around and see [what they can find]. And, you can't always be sure that they're choosing the flight that has the best rate... and if they are, they're spending way too much time doing it on your dime.

Q: What can people do to lower their travel costs?

A: Have a relationship with a travel agency. Our best interest is what's the best cost for you. Any other [search] engine is going to have some type of sort on it. [Consider] off-season travel, off-peak travel, and booking far in advance. This old "oh, if I wait until the last minute there's going to be a good deal"—those days are over.

Q: What motivates you as a businessperson?

A: I feel like if I can help someone have a better travel experience, or convince someone to take a trip they've been thinking about, but were a little apprehensive about... that gives me a sense of purpose. And to spend your whole working day talking about places to go, restaurants, food... it's just a really pleasant business. I really love selling travel. ■

Happy Camper
Happy Mom

Y.
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