



# Hen House LINENS

*every once in a while,  
we just have to crow  
about the Hen!*

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MY STORY

## Smart Landing

A former Navy helicopter pilot sets her sights on family mealtime with her pretty tablecloth line.

**Jenny Davids, 45,** creator of Hen House Linens, Severna Park, MD. Initial investment: \$100,000. Mom of John, 14, Bobby, 11, and Peter, 8.

It was mostly my mom's incessant lectures to be gainfully employed after graduation that led me to my first career as a Navy helicopter pilot. I spent most of my time flying planes and helicopters in Guam and also in the Persian Gulf, where I was deployed. I quit flying shortly after my first son, John, was born.

Life with a newborn called for a change of pace. I had a terrific childhood and wanted to pass down certain experiences—like sitting down to dinner with my family every evening—to my own tribe. Though my mother worked full-time, we always ate

dinner together, and setting a beautiful table was part of it. But as a busy new mom, I couldn't find pretty and functional table linens that would both wash well and look modern. I saw a void in the market I felt I could fill.

I first launched Hen House Linens (Hen is my childhood nickname) in 2002, using off-the-shelf fabrics. The venture failed due to an unexpected bankruptcy in my supply chain, and I had to shut down after just one selling season. This initial try cost me \$15,000, but it also taught me what I needed to know to do it right next time. I realized I needed a manufacturer who would print exclusive designs for me. Five years passed, and in 2007, a good friend came on board to help me with the designs. It took another two years

to finalize our design offering, approve the fabric (all-cotton), printing process and construction, design our packaging and invent our marketing materials. The new and improved Hen House Linens relaunched in January 2009.

Apparently, casually elegant is a winning formula. Our patterns are simple, the colors are complementary. This way, our customers can mix and match the pieces. My hope is that people will build a collection of our linens to use not only for special occasions but in their everyday lives as well. I'm proud that Hen House Linens are sold online and in nearly 500 independent specialty retail locations.

While you might not think covert ops and pretty tablecloths go together, I've found that the leadership and organizational training I received as a Navy lieutenant serve me well in business. In fact, I call on my experiences just about every day in the office, whether dealing with customer service issues or a potential new retailer.

As for my own family table? It's important to simply be there for my three sons and my husband, Scott. So I listen well, play games with them and always serve dinner around a dressed table—a lovely centerpiece for our lives.

—As told to Jennifer Parris



Watch Jenny's clever table-setting tips.



Find Jenny's business strategies at [workingmother.com/jenny](http://workingmother.com/jenny)