

The Eagle's Eye: Catching up with Jane Iredale, founder of Iredale Cosmetics

By Gene Carr, Eagle correspondent
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Jane Iredale is the founder of Iredale Cosmetics, a company she started in 1994 that brought the mineral makeup line jane iredale to the aesthetic industry.
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Jane Iredale is the founder of [Iredale Cosmetics](#), a company she started in 1994 which brought the mineral makeup line jane iredale to the aesthetic industry. She was the first to supply this industry with a line of makeup that had skin care benefits, and a pioneer in clean beauty.

Gene Carr: The story I would like to tell is about you as a corporate visionary in an area known as corporate social responsibility — where companies are focused on giving back to the community.

Jane Iredale: The company has always wanted to make a difference. When we started, I thought that if the company contributed to its community and took care of its employees, that we could accomplish that. It's hard to make a difference on a big scale. As a small company in a small community, I feel the only difference that you can make that is really effective and long-lasting is locally. And that's where we've concentrated our efforts.

For example, we do a lot with women's organizations and organizations where it's not easy to fundraise. The arts are glamorous and give people a lot of satisfaction, but donating to the Humane Society, for instance, doesn't get your name in lights!

Gene: And you have been very involved in local farming as well.

Jane: It started with making our parking lot available to the Great Barrington Farmers Market, and that turned out to be an absolutely wonderful decision as it has become a community meeting place for all ages. I'm a great believer in fresh local food. I think it's the best medicine you can have, and I want it to be available to everybody.

In the process, I got to know farmers and their stories, and realized farming is really difficult, not just because of how hard they work, but because of the cost of the land. So I have this extreme view that I think farmers shouldn't have to pay for their land. If we can buy land, deed it to the Community Land Trust who then leases it to the farmer for usually 98 years at no cost, it solves an enormous problem. The farmers own the buildings and any improvements they make to the land, but the land itself always stays as farmland in perpetuity owned by the Land Trust.

Gene: And you essentially spearheaded an effort just up the road here in Great Barrington? Right?

Jane: Yes, we are working with Off the Shelf Farm. They've always had a wonderful stand at the farmers market where they make the best egg sandwiches ever! Now they've been able to consolidate their business at the farm we purchased, and the State of Massachusetts has just given them a sizable grant to put up a barn and a greenhouse that will house 3,000 chickens. If they hadn't had a permanent home, they wouldn't have had the grant.



Jane Iredale leads U.S. Rep. Richard Neal on a tour of Iredale Cosmetics in Great Barrington in July 2016

Gene: Are there other areas of interest that you have in supporting this community that we haven't talked about?

Jane: The big one, of course, is workforce housing. I want to see Great Barrington thrive, and that means making sure that people of all economic levels can live here and not be traveling hours to get to a job as a waiter where they can barely cover their rent.

Gene: Well, one of the benefits of this interview is to get the word out around this issue of workforce housing, which is not unique to Great Barrington. This is pervasive across the country. But these problems get solved by people who just pick themselves up and say, 'well, we're just going to have to solve this!'

Now to circle back to kind of where we started, we've been talking about how a business can be a force for good. Companies that feel their responsibility is to contribute in some way are ones that actually have more engaged employees and thrive and the company just works better.

Jane: When they do studies on this, they find that money is not by any means the first thing that people want when they look for a job. They want to feel supported, feel they're contributing. And in the end, I think that's what most people want, fulfillment and to know they're leaving something positive. I feel honestly, deeply that you are only as strong as your weakest link, and that's what drives us and always has.