



## Meet the seller



**carstens**

**Barbara Vanderkloot &  
Mary Elisa Calvano**

Carstens  
Chicago, IL



Scan to visit the  
seller's storefront

When the Affordable Care Act mandated that all hospitals go electronic with their records, the owner of the Chicago-based clipboard and binder company, Carstens, knew it could be bad for business. The 130-year-old company was built serving the healthcare industry. Their quality-first binders were the mainstay of record keeping in doctor offices, clinics, nursing homes and hospitals for decades. A switch to digital meant the end of physical records, and potentially the end of a big portion of their business that employs 36 people.

“We had to find a way to breathe new life into the business, and get sales coming in from another direction, and Amazon offered us that,” said Mary Elisa Calvano, SVP of Operations at Carstens. Selling retail to customers on ecommerce would be a first for the family-owned company. Barbara Vanderkloot’s father bought the company in 1954 and began manufacturing many of the products for the medical industry they still sell today. Barbara, Carstens’ current CEO, has built the company into an empire, servicing the organizational needs of medical offices across the country. With Calvano’s help, Carstens would now become an Amazon small business seller, launching the company into a new era. “We really didn’t know what we were doing, but we just thought, ‘Okay, we’re going to give this a try,’” said Vanderkloot. “And now we’re doing over \$1 million worth of sales on Amazon.”

Calvano said the process of becoming a seller on Amazon was easy. Amazon gives sellers the tools, access to customer feedback, and the ongoing free education to learn how to structure costs, and optimize time and investments to continue growing their businesses. They needed to find new customers, and they did on Amazon.

Carstens found favor with Amazon customers making back-to-school purchases and those who worked from home. Because of Amazon customer feedback, they expanded the color set of their binder product line. Now, instead of Kelly green and brown being top sellers, it’s bubble gum and marble-print. “Between 2018 when we started in June until now, we’ve seen exponential growth. It’s been really encouraging,” said Calvano.

### Independent Sellers

**15,000**

There are more than 15,000 independent sellers in Illinois selling in Amazon’s store.

### Average Annual Sales

**\$250,000**

In Illinois, average annual sales per independent seller was more than \$250,000.

### Items Sold

**131 million**

Independent sellers in Illinois sold more than 131 million items in 2023.