

There's something to be said for working
with a close family member like your mother

Family Business





It's not always easy running a small business with a partner. It can be an even greater challenge when that partner is your mother, but several Vermont businesses are making it work. Barbara Patitucci and her daughter Kate Laster have been working together for nearly a decade running the Hob Knob Inn in Stowe, a 20-room inn built on The Mountain Road in 1937 as Stowe's first ski lodge.

For both of them, the experiment has been both a delight and a success. For one thing, they've found their skills and talents complement each other. "Kate's really organized. I'm not," says Patitucci. "I don't want to talk about numbers. It's too big a headache for me. But that's what she likes to do."

Patitucci has done a lot of the work on the physical plant. Installing heaters, toilets, changing mixer valves, and thawing frozen pipes are no problem for her. Although she was a retired schoolteacher when she moved to Vermont and had no innkeeping experience, she now knows more about plumbing, electrical systems, "and crawl spaces with mice" than most men.

Laster has been impressed with her mother's boldness and resourcefulness in tackling such projects. She notes if her mother ran into problems, she'd seek help from YouTube videos. Now Laster has become the primary handywoman around the place, which has freed her Mom to spend more time in the kitchen and put more creativity into her role as chef of the Hob Knob Restaurant.

Patitucci was also happy to hand over the clerical duties, especially the computer work, to her daughter. "That's what kids are for, right?" she jokes. Laster also enjoys caring for the inn's ten acres of lawns and gardens, and building wooden furnish-

Pudio. Et utam repudita is etur accabo. Mint omnis derum commiet am quo voloreh enimolul exceptati te dolor aut officit, eicate quam, evelessima nos et que mint volupta que veribconseria nam, etur autent qui re, consecab

ings such as headboards for the inn's guest rooms. "I bought her a table saw for her birthday," says Patitucci. "A saw to her is like a sewing machine to me."

They both say working together has taught them a lot about who they are and they've learned a lot from each other. "I'm very easy-going. Kate is more assertive. I have teacher skills and can help suggest the right words to use," says Patitucci.

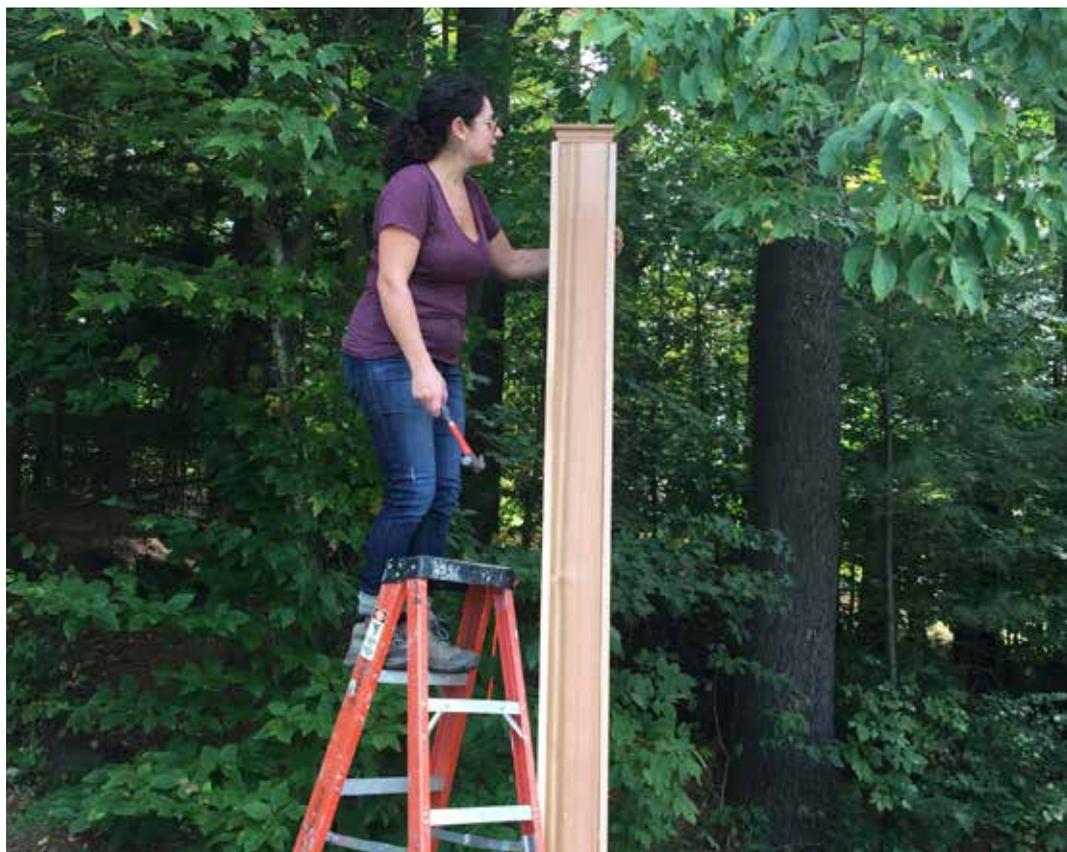
While Patitucci enjoys working back in the kitchen, her daughter likes to be in the restaurant talking to guests. "I'm the bubbly one," says Laster.

Both are thrilled their work arrangement lets them include Laster's two little sons she has with her husband Rick, who works at the Stowe Mountain Lodge. Sam, 4, and Tyler, 3, are integral to the life of the inn. They carry dirty dishes from the dining room to the kitchen, for example, and ask guests if they'd like orange juice with their breakfast, or help shovel snow. Perhaps this is one reason Hob Knob guests often remark they feel like guests in someone's home.

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE SONS

Sometimes, adversity is what brings family together to run a business. After her mother's illness years ago, Karen Korrow took over the leadership of Gillespie Fuels & Propane, a business her parents had bought in 1962. In doing so, Korrow became one of only three women in the energy business in Vermont. At first, her male colleagues in the Vermont Fuel Dealers Association weren't entirely sure how to relate to her. By the 1990's, though, she had become a director of the association.

Both Korrow's sons Rob and Stephen were intrigued with the business. "They enjoyed hanging out with the employees and learning from them," she says. When Stephen was 18, he became one of the



youngest Vermonters ever to be licensed to drive a fuel delivery truck. Rob and Stephen have contributed their own talents to the business for almost 20 years now, during which time the company has added two new locations in Waitsfield and Randolph. Korrow attributes the company's strong growth largely to her sons' involvement.

"They're extremely dedicated, devoted to the company, and they work very hard," she says. Both are state-certified propane and oil heat technicians, and handle both sales and servicing of heating equipment. Rob manages the propane service branch of the business and Stephen manages the oil heat service department. Karen's focus is on the admin-

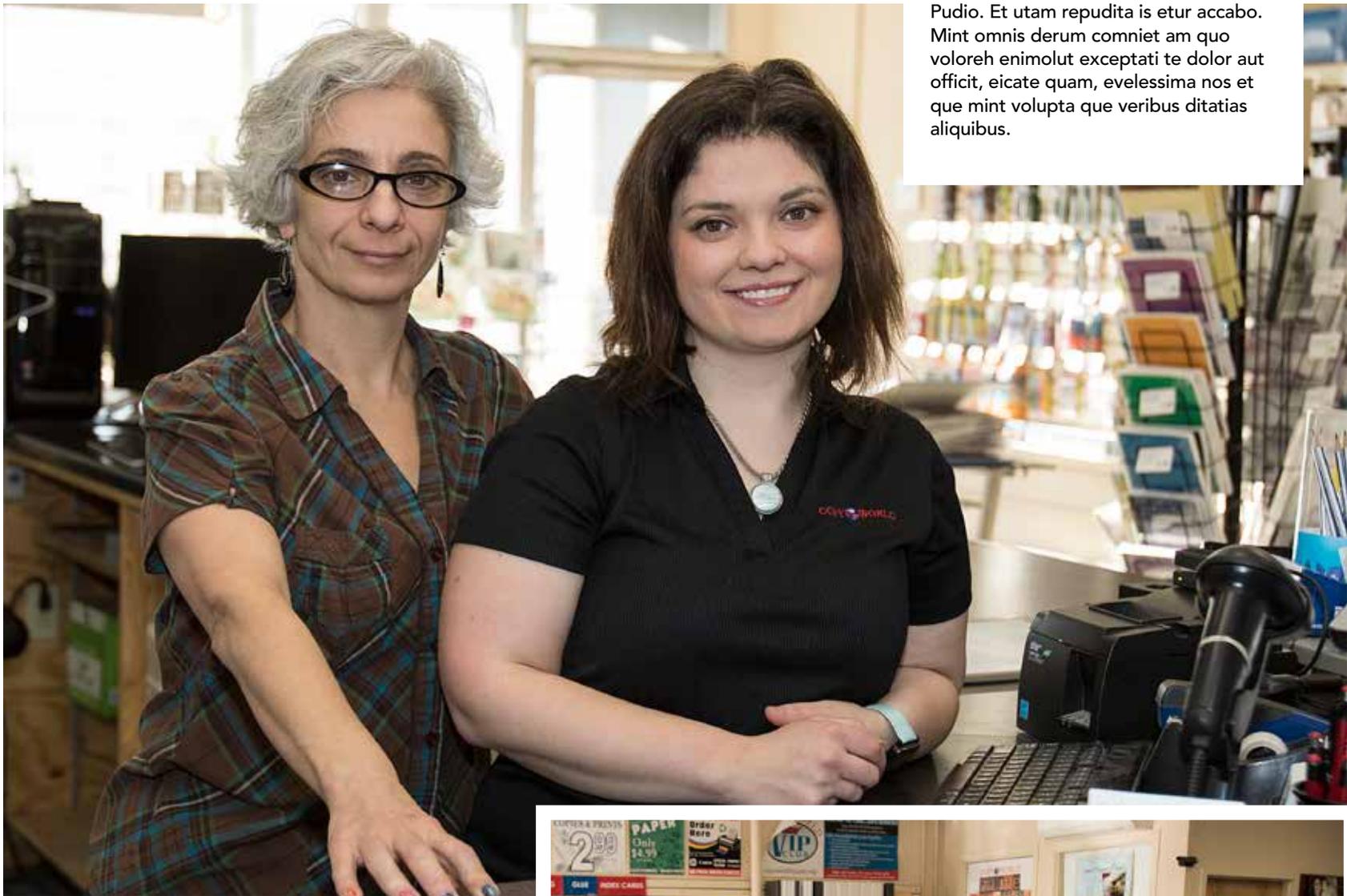


istrative aspect, managing employees and guiding the business' stable growth.

One strategy for keeping harmony in the family is not to discuss business after work. Rob and Stephen and their families often have Sunday dinners at their mother's house, but company matters do not find their way into the conversation. "We try not to bring it home or into the family," Korrow says.

Stephen feels working together as a family has brought the success their business continues to enjoy. "Customers know that their money stays local and supports local events. They know who they are dealing with and they know they can count on us," he says. "I pass out my cell phone number or home number. If they need me I am always willing to help." That comes from a son who was taught early on to take off his shoes inside customers' homes and not to leave dirty fingerprints on their walls, so it warms his mother's heart.

Pudio. Et utam repudita is etur accabo. Mint omnis derum comniet am quo voloreh enimolut exceptati te dolor aut officit, eicate quam, evelessima nos et que mint volupta que veribus ditatias aliquibus.

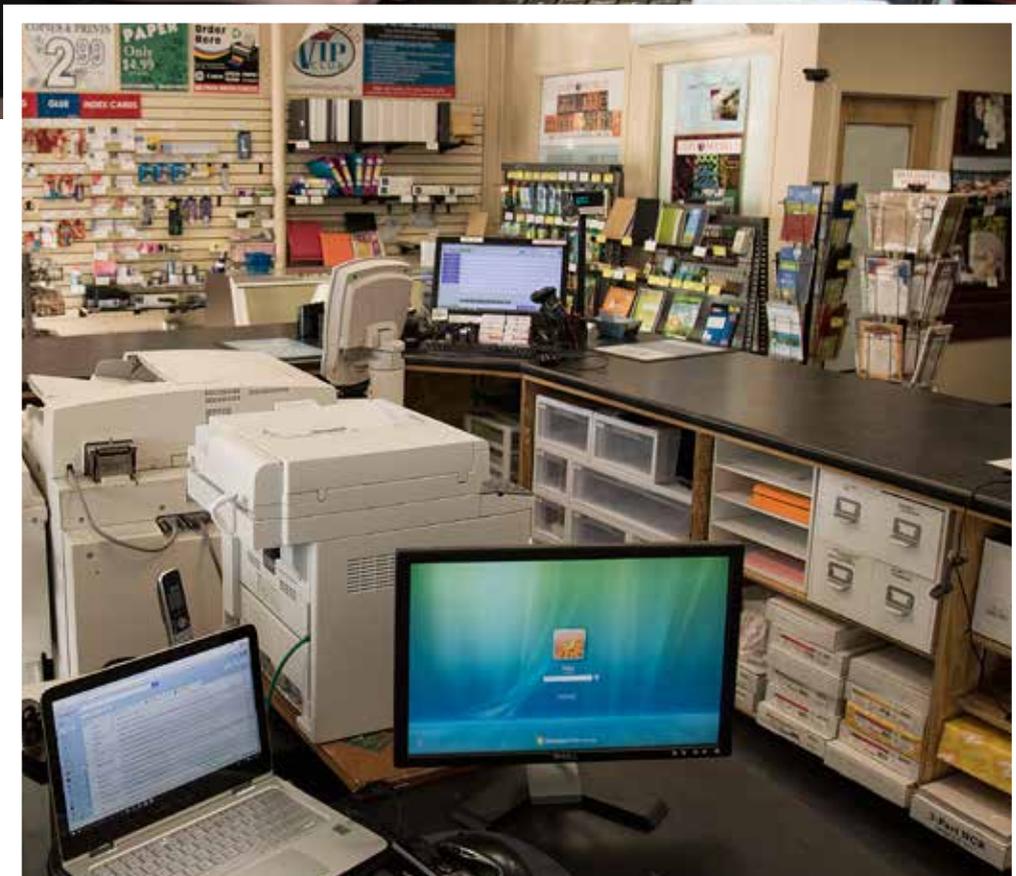


Rob adds growing up around the business and working hand in hand with the technicians and installers of every division has brought mutual respect in relationships with employees, and confidence on the part of customers. “You work harder as a team with family,” he says. “One of our strongest attributes is the teamwork throughout the company.”

KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY

Mollie Lannen, like her mother Linda Aschnowitz, was born and raised in Barre. Lannen studied journalism at St. Michael's College, but discovered her favorite part of it was the graphic design and layout process. Then at age 23, she had the opportunity to go into business with her mom, who was interested in buying Copy World from Lannen's aunt in 2009.

“We thought it was really important that Copy World stay in the family,” says Lannen, referring to how it had been in the family since 1994 and was important to the community. The decision turned





Inside out gallery

out to be fortuitous. According to Lannen, her mother has excellent organizational and people skills, which complement Lannen's creative talent and business development skills. Together they've upgraded the business to include graphic design and marketing services, as well as copying and printing.

"We can play to each other's strengths," Lannen says. It's a partnership that allows for flexibility, switching roles as needed, and for sharing care of Lannen's two-year-old daughter Claire. But Lannen identifies something even more compelling about being in business with a parent—absolute trust.

"The biggest plus is knowing you can depend on your business partner," she says. "I know my mom supports me, wants me to succeed. She's got my back."

Lannen admits being in business with your mom is probably not for everybody. "It can be challenging at times—we can get on each other's nerves," she says. "But most of the time it's really fun. My mom has always been one of my best friends. It's really rewarding getting to work with her."

Lannen notes that most people drift away from their parents when they leave home and lose their close connection with family. So she feels especially glad to be staying close to her mom. "It's such a blessing," she says. That is a mutual blessing, no doubt.

Green Living

At Wake Robin, residents have designed and built three miles of walking trails. Each Spring, we make maple syrup in the community sugar house and each Fall, we harvest honey from our beehives. We compost, plant gardens, and work with staff to follow earth-friendly practices, conserve energy and use locally grown foods.

Live the life you choose—in a vibrant lifecare community that practices "green" ideals. We're happy to tell you more. Visit our website or give us a call today to schedule a tour.

 **WakeRobin**
VERMONT'S LIFECARE COMMUNITY

802.264.5100 / wakerobin.com
SHELBURNE, VERMONT