



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published November 10th, 2010

Local Women Taking Charge of Their Lives

By Sophie Braccini



Dustie Robeson and Amy Berryhill



Lynne Navone



Susan Di Stefano in her favorite hospital gown

Photos Sophie Braccini

"The hardest lesson I learned is that I'm the one in charge of my life," said Leilah Douglass, of Douglass Design, "Others can help, but you have to take charge and go with it." The Women's Empowerment Forum was a panel discussion organized by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and Mechanics Banks on October 19, featuring a dozen seasoned local business women. In Lamorinda, many women take charge of their lives and change their career paths to accommodate their family life or to adapt to a change in circumstance. Their stories are empowering.

Susan Di Stefano spent 20 years raising her sons and volunteering for the Orinda community, and then wanted to start a business of her own. She settled on a concept, but life threw her a curve ball - she was diagnosed with breast cancer. "My silver lining showed up at a most unlikely moment," said Di Stefano, founder of Susan's Silver Lining, "It came to me right after I was handed an old hospital gown with a tear in it and was told to 'undress and put this on.' Before her next appointment, she pulled out a pajama top, cut open the back and sleeves, and sewed in silk ribbons. The next time she went to the doctor, with her own hospital gown to change into, she felt less exposed; more herself and stronger. Her doctors agreed there was no reason she should not wear her own gown.

Di Stefano realized that she could create hospital gowns for others as well, in cheerful and fun fabrics, and she made several prototype gowns that tied at the side instead of the back. Nurses offered suggestions and at each visit she took her note pad and jotted down ideas. "That was what kept me going last year," said Di Stefano, who is now cancer-free. "I've been asked to have some gowns in hospital gift stores," she says, "and if my gowns can make a sick woman feel a little better and stronger, that's what will make me happy." The gowns come in different fabrics, from leopard print, to French country, to cupcakes, and are made locally of high quality cotton. They can be ordered online at susansilverlining.com.

Nothing that dramatic happened in the lives of Dustie Robeson and Amy Berryhill. It was meeting each other through a friend that was the catalyst to switching from corporate careers to their passion-become-business: organizing other people's space. "During a company meeting we asked each other what would be our dream job," said Berryhill, an Orinda mom who was then in sales and marketing for a pharmaceutical company, "and I said: professional organizer!"

When Berryhill met Robeson, their common love for building efficiency brought them together and their complementarities make their business a success. They acknowledge that getting organized can be a very emotional process and that no system works for everyone. They believe that being a team makes them more creative and efficient. They specialize in residential organizing, love working with kids, families, and home-based businesses. They can be reached through their web site at SpiffyChicks.com.

The transition from the corporate life to mother/entrepreneur has gone smoothly for the SpiffyChicks. Lynne Navone hopes for an equally straightforward ride. The Moraga mom just launched 24/7, a Personal Assistant service. Navone used to be an administrative assistant, 'before kids,' for Gumps in San Francisco, and the Sierra Club. She's since volunteered in the community, but it's been 20 years since she left the corporate world.

Navone needed to invent a new role for herself. "One day, when I needed to be at two places at the same time, it dawned on me that we sometimes have a need for a personal assistant, someone you know and trust, and can free up some time." Navone runs errands for her clients; around the home she supervises repairs and deliveries, organizes photos and scrapbooks, and helps with clutter. In a home business setting she manages emails, phone calls and correspondence and makes travel and business arrangements. She provides


file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Andy/My%2...f/Local-Women-Taking-Charge-of-Their-Lives.html (1 of 2) [11/9/2010 9:09:51 AM]

"concierge" services and helps with holidays and special events planning. Finally, courtesy of her Italian roots and family tradition of homemade dinners, she plans and cooks for everyday meals or special occasions. For more details, her web site is www.twentyfoursevenhelp.com, or call 876-7314.

The owners of the three businesses featured here were part of the Lafayette forum and they embody the words of wisdom that were shared there. "If you don't love what you do, you should be doing something else," said Chevron executive Sheila Taylor during the event, who realized one morning that her passion for her job was waning and she became an owner of the Wine Country Trekking company.

"Flexibility is key to be able to transition," said Anne Grodin who, among many other careers, was a key player in the establishment of the Lafayette Community Foundation. Professionals, volunteers, Chief Domestic Officers - Lamorinda women certainly tally a variety of experience. Like Susan, Dustie, Amy, Lynne, Leila, Sheila and Anne, all they need to soar is to discover their passion and act on it.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright  Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA