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Local organic food brand founder remembered as 'a force of nature'



Carla Bartolucci, owner of Jovial Foods in North Stonington, gives a presentation Aug. 10, 2017, about her company during one of its 'Einkorn Evenings.' Bartolucci has died at the age of 53. (Amanda Hutchinson/The Day)

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Melina Khan, Special to The Day

Carla Bartolucci, founder and CEO of Jovial Foods, a North Stonington-based organic food company, died May 22 at her home in Italy after a brief illness. She was 53.

Bartolucci and her husband, Rodolfo Viola, co-founded Jovial Foods in 2010 after their daughter was diagnosed with a gluten sensitivity. Already professionals in the organic food sector, they began researching possible solutions for their daughter's restricted diet, without compromising flavor and nutrition. They discovered einkorn, an ancient species of wheat that is tolerable, due to its genetic makeup, for those with a wheat or gluten sensitivity.

Thus, Jovial Foods was born and became a market for organic and gluten-free food options and the largest grower of einkorn, which is grown in Italy under strict sustainability standards. In addition to einkorn products, they sell gluten- and grain-free pastas, flours, olive oil and jarred tomatoes and beans. Jovial's warehouse and administrative buildings have been located on Route 2 in North Stonington since 2016 (<https://www.theday.com/business/20161005/food-company-ready-to-show-off-randalls-ordinary-property>).

In addition to her business endeavors, Bartolucci was a baker, cooking instructor (<https://www.theday.com/local/20170822/x201ceinkorn-eveningsx201d-are-jovial-foods2019s-next-step-in-building-community>) and cookbook author. She will be remembered as a pioneer in the organic food industry, as well as a loving mother, wife and sister.

She leaves a legacy as someone who set the "bar and standard really high" for clean food, said Heidi Gordon, Jovial's marketing manager and a longtime friend of Bartolucci. "(She) had a tremendous amount of integrity and authenticity in everything she did."

Several other Jovial employees, many of whom joined the brand with no experience in the organic food sector and have now been involved for decades under Bartolucci's direction, also spoke highly of her.

Danielle Johnson, the company's controller, said she had not intended on leaving public accounting before joining Jovial, but after spending one afternoon with Bartolucci, she was "completely hooked."

"Carla was a force of nature," Johnson said. "She was the strongest woman I've known."

Though she lived in Italy, in a time zone six hours ahead of Connecticut, Bartolucci still would be sending emails at 5 p.m. EST, Johnson said. She was continuously working on new products and ideas for the company.

"In the 16 years I knew her, her ingenuity never slowed down," Johnson said. "If anything, it got stronger."

Tim Sperry, a company adviser and friend, said Bartolucci was always focused on doing good for her company, employees and customers. "She pushed the envelope," he said. "She wanted to produce the best product and she wasn't looking for praise and glory for what she was doing."

Bartolucci's daughter Giulia, who inspired the einkorn breakthrough, will be joining Jovial to help continue its mission.

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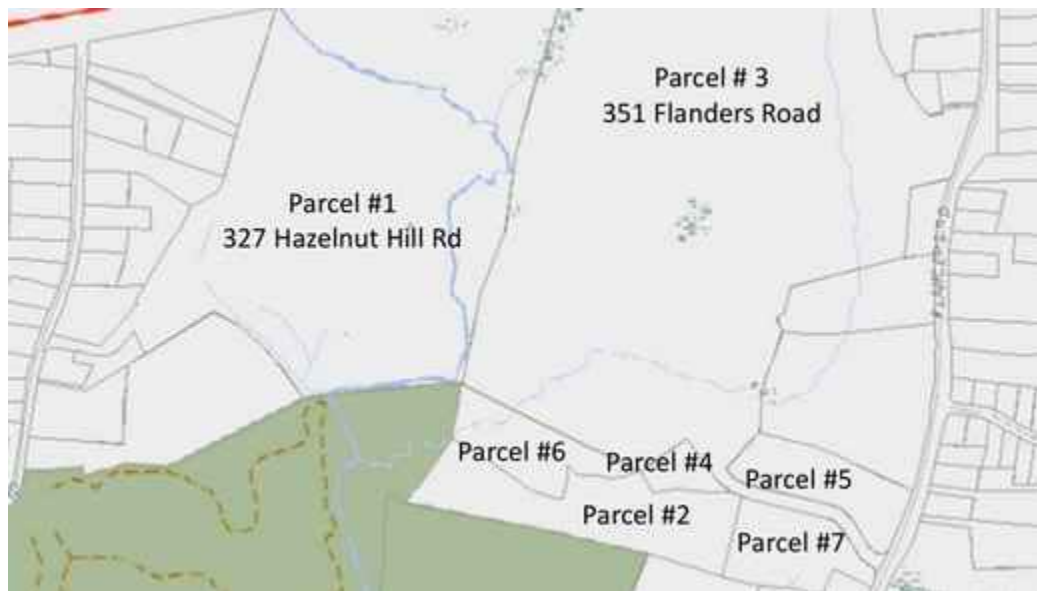
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A proposed data center agreement for land south of Interstate 95 between Hazelnut Hill and Flanders Roads will be presented to the public on Thursday.