

PORTSMOUTH

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*Women
of the
Seacoast*

MAY 2025
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inside *the issue*

MAY 2025 | LADIES



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On the Cover

Women—like nature's most hardy plant—are resilient. No season can shake us loose from the ground which we stand. This women's issue represents all of the graceful, powerful, and courageous ways women forge ahead, up from ashes.

Florist, Wild Valentine & model, Tyler Whittum

Photography:
Lindsay Elltharp -
Eggplant Armadillo
Creative

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LEADING *through listening*

SEACOAST BUSINESS LEADERS BUILT
CONFIDENCE, COMPASSION, AND THEIR
COMPANIES WITH HELP FROM MENTORS

ARTICLE BY ANN KATHRYN KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN EDGE

It's May, the month that celebrates women—often, mothers—in our lives who made an impact on us. Six Seacoast business leaders share who tops their lists, with some fathers in this roundup getting the shout-out!

The biggest commonality? They all cite the importance of fully listening—a critical social skill that helps them seek to understand other people's perspectives, desires and goals, prioritize shared outcomes, see the best in each other, and lift one another up.

Thank you to The Hotel Portsmouth for graciously hosting our photo shoot at their fun and colorful downtown Portsmouth property.

Scale, proportion, and balance are critical elements to each project Sheri Gibson brings to life for her clients through the interior design firm she owns, Rein & Company, with locations in Durham and Chicago. But equally important, Gibson says, is the art of listening and the trust it builds—the North Star she follows in her design approach and client relations.

TELL US ABOUT A MENTOR WHO HAD A LASTING IMPACT AND CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE.

Gibson holds the highest regard for a former employer and mentor early in her career. “A big reason I’m where I am today is because of Kristin Petro,” she says. Years earlier, Petro—who owns a design company in the Chicago area—took Gibson under her wing, instilling in her encouragement, autonomy, and confidence to drive her own design projects for Petro’s company. “I jumped in and learned by doing.”

Gibson was one of several designers there. She added that weekly meetings where the women shared what they’d learned, and traded design inspiration, contributed to an open, inclusive workspace. As she gained experience and developed her unique aesthetic, Gibson realized she was ready to take the leap and open her own business.

“I learned so much from Kristin about growing a company with integrity,” Gibson states. “Her business is grounded in strong ethics and she’s never been out to just make money. She’s committed to improving people’s lives through thoughtful interior designs that work, first and foremost, for them.”

Gibson emphasizes that her projects are relationship-driven as she brings to life what truly represents her clients’ style, how they live, and what’s important to them. She listens to develop creative feedback, which brings together form and function in beautiful, practical ways, while aligning to budgets and timelines—giving them a result they love living with.

AND IF YOU COULD PASS ALONG ONE BIG LESSON TO THE NEXT GENERATION, WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?

“Go out into the world with an open heart,” Gibson says, “and find the beauty and diversity in the big things—cultures, people, ideas—but also the small, everyday things all around us.”

*“Go out into the world
with an open heart.”*

SHERI
Gibson

OWNER AND PRINCIPAL DESIGNER
REIN & COMPANY DESIGN



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KIM Fortuna

VICE PRESIDENT
MARC MICHAUD ACCOUNTING SERVICES



*“It’s important that
women lift each other up.”*

Before joining Marc Michaud Accounting Services in North Hampton, where as vice president she manages operations and oversees client relations, Kim Fortuna was CEO of a non-medical home care agency. Fortuna cites listening as a top skill that helped propel her company’s success, and credits her father with reminding her often of its importance.

TELL US ABOUT A MENTOR WHO HAD A LASTING IMPACT AND CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE.

Fortuna doesn’t hesitate. “My father. He’s always been my go-to person, certainly while I was running Griswold Home Care but really, throughout my life. We joke in my family that Dad should have been a priest because everyone goes to him for guidance.”

Fortuna’s father, like his daughter, was an entrepreneur before he retired. He was therefore a natural choice to advise her on her business. He reinforced in Fortuna the need to listen carefully and consider all angles each home care scenario presented, so she could advise her clients accordingly. Her father, she says, uses diplomacy when dispensing advice—even now, after she closed Griswold and joined the accounting firm—but always balanced it with a bit of tough love. And that’s just fine with her.

“I didn’t want him telling me all the time I was managing Griswold, oh, everything you’re doing is perfect,” Fortuna remembers. “It was more helpful to hear what I perhaps was not doing as well or was not considering. That’s how I grew professionally, and improved my confidence and my customer service.”

She carries this with her to her current role, and chuckles that the accounting firm’s clients sometimes get hives at the mention of tax paperwork. Active listening helps her put people at ease and focus on goals.

AND IF YOU COULD PASS ALONG ONE BIG LESSON TO THE NEXT GENERATION, WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?

“Support people,” Fortuna says. “I especially love seeing women championing women, in business and in our personal lives. It’s important that we lift each other up.”

Fathers as pivotal mentors again surfaced while chatting with Maya Srinivasan, owner of Great Northern Builders in South Berwick, Maine. In business since 2002, the 23-year-old company specializes in residential remodeling and new construction in the Seacoast areas of New Hampshire and Maine. “We provide safe, happy, and predictable home remodeling services,” Srinivasan says.

TELL US ABOUT A MENTOR WHO HAD A LASTING IMPACT AND CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE.

“My dad. Absolutely.” Srinivasan explains that her father emigrated from India to Canada in 1963. She praises her father’s calm demeanor, his well-informed views, and what she describes as his gift to genuinely connect with people.

“He finds out what’s important to them and instinctually recognizes what makes each person special. As a result, he’s able to help people shine.”

Srinivasan learned from her father how to seek out the best in others, an approach that helps her nurture and encourage her employees to bring their A-games to work. “When I’m navigating workplace relationships, I try to emulate my father’s example of listening and showing interest in—and then showcasing—their unique talents.”

Srinivasan points out how this strengthens trust and opens opportunities for professional and personal growth, all-around. This perspective is foundational to how she drives her business forward and is able to offer the highest level of customer service and satisfaction.

AND IF YOU COULD PASS ALONG ONE BIG LESSON TO THE NEXT GENERATION, WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?

“There’s a place for you in the world, doing what you want and love to do,” Srinivasan says. “As long as you’re prepared to work harder than everyone else, and eat beans and rice if you need to, you can succeed at what you love, with time.”

“There’s a place for you in the world, doing what you want and love to do.”

MAYA Srinivasan, CGR, CAPS

OWNER AND PRESIDENT
GREAT NORTHERN BUILDERS



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PAT Bennett, CLTC®

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT
LONGEVITY PLANNING



“There’s great joy in supporting and learning from one another.”

Pat Bennett points to strong peer group engagement for more than 28 years as a key factor to her success with Longevity Planning, the Portsmouth business she founded that offers personalized insurance options to help families protect their assets and independence. Longevity Planning provides insurance solutions for long-term care, life, and disability income protection, as well as guidance to plan for and minimize healthcare expenses at retirement age.

TELL US ABOUT A MENTOR WHO HAD A LASTING IMPACT AND CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE.

Bennett calls out her mentor, Laurie Chandler, whom she met in 1992 through the Women’s Business Center in Portsmouth that served female entrepreneurs on the Seacoast for 15 years before closing in 2010. “Laurie was on their board. I’ve admired her professionalism and grace for decades, attributes many people would name when speaking of Laurie.”

Bennett says Chandler was always educating and inspiring people toward financial independence. When Bennett started her business, Chandler advised her to form and lean on a peer advisory group. Bennett has nurtured those relationships for decades, describing how the group continues to support each other as their various ventures grew from start-ups to successful companies.

“We ask questions, we listen, and we learn,” Bennett continues. “We exchange ideas about strategy, education, networking opportunities. We’re invested in helping each other figure out what works and doesn’t work.”

Through it all, Bennett says Chandler remains a trusted advisor: “She’s still inspiring me, all these years later.”

AND IF YOU COULD PASS ALONG ONE BIG LESSON TO THE NEXT GENERATION, WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?

“Find out what you’re passionate about,” Bennett recommends, “and make it your life’s work.” She encourages people to form peer groups, as she did, with those who share like-minded interests and goals. “It’s made such a difference for me, professionally and personally. There’s great joy in supporting and learning from one another.”

Becky Florence's decades-long career in custom picture framing has taken her from the East to the West Coast and back to New England, once more. She and her husband David Pratt own D. Pratt Framer, with locations in Rye as well as Kittery, Maine. They share an important—and rare—certification: that of Master Certified Picture Framer (MCPF®). There are fewer than 100 MCPFs worldwide and Florence is the only certified professional currently practicing in New Hampshire.

TELL US ABOUT A MENTOR WHO HAD A LASTING IMPACT AND CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE.

"My maternal grandmother," Florence answers. "She was fierce and loyal. Born in 1919, she raised five children and was the breadwinner—a testament to her hard work and resilient spirit."

While Florence says she models her strong work ethic after her grandmother (and names her mother as a second role model), she's always been driven to expand her horizons. "My grandmother died in 2002 and in her 80-something years, she lived in only one place," Florence explains. "I didn't want that. So, soon after she passed, I sold all my possessions and drove to California."

If that sounds like lyrics to a well-known song about wanderlust and the promise of California dreamin', well, the results weren't far off. Florence says she loved her experience, and developed her design talents along with people management skills while running several framing stores in the San Francisco area for 10 years. "I learned more in my decade out there than the previous 20 years I'd spent on the East Coast," she states.

Yet, home was calling and she returned to the Seacoast in 2012, eventually meeting her future husband. D. Pratt Framer has been in business nearly 40 years. As a more recent co-owner, Florence balances the business side with the creative fulfillment of working one-on-one with clients to frame their treasured art pieces. "I learned a great deal from my grandmother but also proved to myself what I'm capable of during that time I struck out on my own without a net."

AND IF YOU COULD PASS ALONG ONE BIG LESSON TO THE NEXT GENERATION, WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?

"For women in business, explore as much of the world as you can," Florence urges. "Leave your comfort zone." And for women in general? "Learn a trade. Learn how to use tools. I promise, you'll fall back on this again and again."

"Learn a trade. Learn how to use tools. You'll fall back on this again and again."

BECKY Florence, MCPF®

PRESIDENT
D. PRATT FRAMER



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KAREN *Duprey*

OWNER
RESTORE HYPER WELLNESS



*“Press forward and
don’t give up.”*

While active listening to understand another’s perspective and goals is the shared through-line across our profiled business leaders, owner of Restore Hyper Wellness, Karen Duprey, adds an additional takeaway. “Inviting feedback and really hearing it is important,” she says, “but so is balancing that with what our own instincts tell us as we pursue our outcomes.”

Put another way, it’s just as important that we all remember to listen to ourselves.

TELL US ABOUT A MENTOR WHO HAD A LASTING IMPACT AND CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE.

Duprey points to a business leader early in her career who advised her to weigh feedback she received against her own gut feel. “Feedback is just data,” she remembers her mentor telling her, “and simply because someone tells you what they would do does not always mean they’re correct or that you must act on their advice. You also need to listen to your own intuition.”

This perspective remains top-of-mind for Duprey in how she operates Restore, the business she owns with her husband in two Portsmouth locations—on Lafayette Road and Woodbury Avenue—and a third location in Nashua. Duprey explains that Restore’s mission is, quite simply, to help people do more. Utilizing science-backed therapies and customized plans, Restore guides clients in how to remain healthy, happy, and engaged for as long as possible.

In helping her clients build roadmaps toward wellness, Duprey applies a similar feedback loop to what her mentor described years earlier. She seeks to balance what she’s heard from each client on preferences and instincts about their wellness journeys and then find alignment in the recommendations she provides.

“To be successful, listening must be two-way,” she continues. “We help our clients see their potential, but they need to actively drive their results.”

AND IF YOU COULD PASS ALONG ONE BIG LESSON TO THE NEXT GENERATION, WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?

Duprey points once more to trusting one’s own instincts. “Each of us knows what we want. So, press forward and don’t give up.”