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PHOTO BY ROLAND LANE

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WENDY NORBOM

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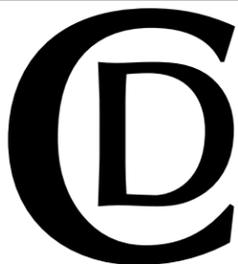


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Michelle Stennett regales Wendy Jaquet and Angenie McCleary with tales of being a woman in the Idaho Senate at a Ketchum coffee shop.

IDAHO'S FIRST LADIES

FOUR OF IDAHO'S FEMALE POLITICIANS DISCUSS
THE PLUSES AND PITFALLS OF BEING A WOMAN IN POLITICS.

BY KATHERINE WUTZ—EXPRESS STAFF WRITER
PHOTO BY ROLAND LANE

Idaho politics have traditionally been dominated by males, but women are increasingly breaking through to join that club.

Reps. Wendy Jaquet, D-Ketchum, and Donna Pence, D-Gooding, daily enter a room where they are two of 20 women in the 70-member Idaho House of Representatives. Sen. Michelle Stennett, D-Ketchum, is one of nine women in the 35-member Senate.

These bodies have made significant strides in including women; in 1982, only 10 of 105 legislators were female. By 1992, 36 of 126 legislators were female, but 2011 marked the first session that all elected lawmakers from District 25, which includes Blaine, Lincoln, Camas and Gooding counties, were women.

Jaquet, Pence, Stennett and Angenie McCleary (chair of the Blaine County Board of County Commissioners) sat down with Valley Woman to discuss respect, gender roles and balancing convictions with peacemaking while serving in a male-dominated political arena.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

In a way, it feels demeaning to even ask these powerful women if they struggle in what has been a male-dominated field. Jaquet has been in the Legislature since 1994, and ran the Sun Valley-Ketchum Chamber & Visitors Bureau before that. Stennett shone in her first elected session last year as Senate minority caucus chair, Pence is finishing her third term in the House and when McCleary was first appointed to fill a vacancy, she was the youngest county commissioner in the state. She is now chair.

"I'm not sure I even want to acknowledge that it's difficult," McCleary said. "Even internally, it's kind of this circular thing where I'm not even sure I want to admit that people treat me differently."

At the same time, though, the four agreed that sometimes it's a struggle to get the respect they feel they deserve.

"I've had a legislator's wife tell me

that she says to him every morning over breakfast, 'Now, you be nice to Wendy today,'" Jaquet said. "It's sweet, but she has obviously figured out that maybe the men are not as nice as they should be."

Stennett said that when she first became minority caucus chair in 2011, she worried about trying to establish her authority in a caucus full of men.

"When I sit down with the governor and I'm with the [state] leadership, often I'm the only woman in the room," she said. "I thought that in dealing with them, they would try to put the 'little lady' in her place. But I feel that they've been very respectful."

The women said that being the only woman in a room full of men brings different dynamics than when there is more of a balance between genders. They said men tend to be more aggressive, and professionalism can be thrown out the window when the gentlemen in the room form a "pack mentality."

McCleary remembered one instance when she was in a small-group meeting with local leaders and county staff on a controversial issue and the men began grilling her mercilessly.

"I got very upset," she said, even to the point of having to leave the room. "The vibe gets really disrespectful, and I feel like the men in the room kind of build on each other. It gets to a point where it's not the behavior that I would hope a group of adults would display."

In the Senate, Stennett said, it's harder to simply abandon professionalism. Senate hearings are governed by strict rules, which provides a certain courtesy and structure.

"It makes people slow down and be courteous," Stennett said. "I feel like they've been really respectful."

But in leadership positions where the rules are not as established, such as chair of the Board of County Commissioners, establishing one's role can be more difficult. McCleary said she had to work much harder to establish her role as chair than she

might have had to do as a man.

"Moving to being the chair was one of the hardest things I've done in this job," she said. "The first six months, I had to do so much just to establish how I wanted to be treated."

She wasn't sure if that was because she was a woman, young or simply inherently non-combative, but the struggle was so obvious that members of the public began stepping up in support, telling her not to give up or cave in to other members of the commission.

While that support helped a little bit, she felt that sometimes the support came across as back-handed.

"Sometimes, [expression] of that support can be some of the times that I question their motives," she said. "How do they see me as a female if they felt like they had to make that comment? Sometimes, that's what it is—'Oh, I didn't know that a young female could do that'—but maybe they are just trying to work through their own previous misconceptions."

'SPEAK YOUR TRUTH'

All four women agreed that balancing the need to stand up and earn respect while fighting the stereotype of an overly aggressive woman can be difficult. Women often have a different approach from men when dealing with sensitive topics—but that doesn't mean it's weaker.

"Women bring a different strength to politics," Stennett said. "The way we should approach it is not to try and be like the guys. You bring a sort of softness to it, but you can be firm."

Jaquet and Pence said that women tend to be the compromisers, the ones to look to the middle rather than the extremes of an issue in order to find a solution.

"We're peacemakers," Pence said. "We help people get along. Males are naturally more aggressive, and that's the way they accomplish things."

McCleary said that though her

natural tendency is to avoid conflict, she does find herself in situations where avoidance is not an option. But that doesn't mean she suddenly becomes overly aggressive, she said.

"I don't think that you need to be a bully to be effective. You don't have to throw a fit, you don't have to have a tantrum, you can be composed and stand your ground. I don't want to become this overly aggressive female because I feel that's the only way I can get something done."

Stennett agreed, saying that her strength lies in knowing what her core, unshakable beliefs are and staying true to them, no matter the issue.

"You just keep trying to speak your truth," she said. "People intuitively know if you're bullshitting them or trying to shoot straight."

Jaquet and Pence said that sometimes, the threat of political retribution can and does keep women from speaking out on issues such as abortion or women's health.

"Abortion bills have always been brought by men," Jaquet said. "The women you would think would stand up don't, because men seem to be dominant. If you are a woman and you want to keep your chairmanship—even if you are a man and you want to keep your chairmanship—you have to vote with the team."

"They may feel [the bill is wrong], but they don't feel that they can stand up," Pence added.

GENDER BIAS

Another challenge the women feel is unique to their sex is age. Age appears to play a much larger role when it is a woman, rather than a man, in a leadership position.

"More than with men, age comes into it," McCleary said. "You're either too old for the job, you're too young for the job or you're at an age where you are going to have a family, so they wonder what your level of involvement will be."

Jaquet agreed, laughing, and added that she was worried about her then-pending election to the Ketchum-Sun Valley Marketing Alliance board—she worried she was too old, she said.

She also recounted a story about a fellow female legislator who was lambasted by her peers for leaving young children at home with their father for three to four months a year. It seemed unfair, she said, especially because the father was a teacher, and was able to leave work and be home when the children were there.

"[The male legislators] could not understand that her husband might be filling part of that role," she said.

"Probably because they would never think about doing it!" Pence joked.

Switching gender roles does cause some confusion and judgment on all levels of government, McCleary argued. Her husband does not attend many political functions with her—she says she notices that Jaquet receives more comments about this than she does.

"There's pressure to 'look right,'" she said. "People just don't know what to do when you switch those

roles around. I don't really need my husband standing beside me and shaking hands."

Jaquet and Pence said that their husbands, Jim and Lew, don't really attend functions with them either. Again, while they don't seem to mind, both women said they get comments—mostly from legislator's wives—that it's strange their husbands don't come.

Interactions with the wives of male peers can sometimes be trickier than working with the men, the women agreed. McCleary said perhaps some of the difficulty she finds is part of the age conundrum, but that she definitely feels a bit strange when dealing with the wives of county commissioners statewide.

"It's the wives who make stranger comments to me about how this isn't an appropriate thing I was doing," she said. "They would ask if I had kids, when I was going to have kids—"

"—it's like, when are you going to get on with your life?" Jaquet

interrupted with a laugh. She added that normally, the women who make these comments either wish they had taken on a legislative role or they simply value more traditional gender roles.

Even among peers, there is not an instant solidarity, the women agreed, citing an example of a female Republican anti-abortion lobbyist.

"You are not immediately going to attach to anyone," Stennett said. "There is a different kind of relationship with women, though, just because we know that we are fighting the fight in a man's world."

WORDS OF WISDOM

For young women who are thinking about going into politics, the women suggested taking on a female political mentor—Jaquet suggested McCleary, while the other women pointed out that Jaquet has done an extraordinary amount of mentoring herself.

McCleary said that sometimes it can be discouraging to be a 'young female' in politics, but she has fought through the comments and plans on running again for county commissioner in November. She said she had thought about running for the legislature, but was discouraged by male county commissioners in the state who felt the legislature, especially the House, was too conservative.

"Their comment to me was, 'As a young female, you'll never get anything done,'" she said.

But Stennett said that being a productive woman in the state Legislature is possible, if women simply play to their own strengths.

"We tend to be better listeners," she said. "You can say absolutely nothing and have that person walk away saying, 'She was such a great person to talk to.' It goes a long way toward making people feel comfortable."

Stennett, Pence and McCleary are all running for re-election in November. Stennett is unopposed, but both Pence and McCleary will be facing men in the general election, and two men will compete over the seat Jaquet is retiring from.

“WOMEN BRING A DIFFERENT STRENGTH TO POLITICS.”

MICHELLE STENNETT

“THEIR COMMENT TO ME WAS, ‘AS A YOUNG FEMALE, YOU’LL NEVER GET ANYTHING DONE.’”

ANGENIE MCCLEARY

“I’VE HAD A LEGISLATOR’S WIFE TELL ME THAT SHE SAYS TO HIM EVERY MORNING OVER BREAKFAST, ‘NOW, YOU BE NICE TO WENDY TODAY.’”

WENDY JAQUET



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In 1998 the Gnarlys set out from Canada for the first leg of a Great Divide adventure. Left to right Sharon Steiner, Carol Knight, Peggy Dean and Sue Petersen. Courtesy photo.

RIDING WITH THE GNARLY OLD BROADS

A GROUP OF LOCAL WOMEN LET THEIR HAIR DOWN ALONG THE GREAT DIVIDE

BY JENNIFER TUOHY—EXPRESS STAFF WRITER

In the seminal television series "Sex and the City," cultural icon Carrie Bradshaw and her bevy of best friends let their hair down after a hard days work by sipping cosmos in New York's hottest bars while discussing men, men and more men.

For the typical Wood River Valley woman, a girls night out might include the aforementioned cocktail, but chances are that it will come out of a thermos, be served in a plastic cup and be sipped while the women survey the spectacular view from a mountaintop and discuss men, men and more men.

A group of valley women have taken this Idaho sensibility a step further. Their girls nights out became a 3,000-mile mountain bike odyssey across the continental United States. Oh, and they're a few years older than Ms. Bradshaw and her babes. The Gnarly Old Broads, as they call themselves, range from 54 to 77 years old.

Born on the Burr Trail in Southern Utah, the Gnarly Old Broads celebrate their 18th year in 2012. Composed of different groups drawn from an always constant circle of friends, the Gnarlys' idea of good old-fashioned girl time is mountain biking past forest fires, dodging grizzly bears and circling the wilderness on hair-raising tracks, all in preparation for a well-deserved cocktail hour by the campfire.

The original Gnarlys are Sharon Steiner, Carol Knight, Sue Petersen and Peggy Dean. More recent inductees include Penny Harper, Becky Stokes, Jude Hawkes, Linda Parsons and Lilly Simpson. Their common mission is to get away from it all with an arduous mountain biking/camping trip once a year, and for eight of the last 18 they tackled the Great Divide.

"The Gnarlys came to be following that first trip on the Burr Trail in Utah," said founding member Steiner, a Ketchum resident and part-time personal assistant. "There was a wilderness advocacy group around back then called the Great Old Broads for Wilderness. We thought the name was pretty cool—we'd probably had a few glasses of wine—and came up with Gnarly Old Broads."

The group has tackled numerous challenging mountain bike trips, including Copper Canyon in Mexico; Pinyon Peak near Stanley, Copper Basin, Dollarhide Summit and Magruder Corridor, all in Idaho; and the White Rim Trail in Utah. But the one that they're most proud of is the Great Divide trail.

It was 1998. Steiner had read in Adventure Cyclist magazine that a trail had just been mapped out that took in the Continental Divide from the border of Mexico to the border of Canada.

"She suggested we should start doing it in segments," said founding Gnarly Carol Knight, owner of The Toy Store in Ketchum and Sun Valley. "So we took a Suburban, packed in all our camping gear and took turns driving and riding. We'd do 300 to 400 miles a trip, and would pick up the next year where we left off the last."

Squeezing up to five women, their tents, sleeping bags, bicycles, coolers, extra tires and other essential "supplies" ("We had to have cocktail hour," Knight said firmly) into one little car, the ladies started the Great Divide trail at Roosville, Canada, and ended at Antelope Wells, N.M.

The route consistently stays within 50 miles of the Continental Divide the whole way.

"It's all on backcountry Forest Service roads, a little bit of trails and a little bit of pavement, but mostly just really bad Forest Service roads," Steiner said.

Completing the trip took the Gnarlys eight years (between 1998 and 2008) and through five states (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico).

"Some years there would be only three of us, others there were five or six," Steiner said.

According to Knight, the trips were the ultimate way to let their hair down and enjoy life with the girls.

"We all love the outdoors, we all love camping, we all love drinking. ..."

"Don't put that in!" Steiner interjected.

"... and we all love gossiping," Knight continued.

What more could you want?

"Over the years we have developed quite the friendships," Steiner said. "When you go out and camp and get in difficult situations, you work out problems, it's a pretty cool thing."

The intrepid bikers faced thunderstorms, braved scorching heat, battled fierce headwinds and at one point even cycled through a forest fire.

"As we went through Montana there was a huge fire near Helena," Steiner said.

"We were smoked out," Knight said. "It was awful."

"That year a little black bear cub came into our camp. We figured out that mom would be shortly behind and made Sue [Petersen] move camp," Steiner said. "She was very angry that we moved camp on her. And then, where we ended up camping, these just terrible people came and camped right next to us. It was right during this fire and they built this huge bonfire, and they had guns and one of those great big dually trucks. They were just swearing and loud and we were scared to death that they were going to get terribly drunk and murder us in the night. So we made Sue move again that same night. We were totally freaked out."

The Gnarlys' achievement is not a small one. On one stretch they ran into the people who mapped the original Great Divide route for Adventure Cyclist magazine.

"They wrote a story about meeting us in the magazine," Steiner said.

"We invited him [to our camp] for a cocktail," Knight said. "He was quite amazed because most people who do the Great Divide do it solo or as two people, or six or seven riders with a guide, and they carry their own gear. But there we were doing the Great Divide with a Suburban and all the comforts of home, cooking really great dinners every night."

"Most of those doing it are seriously macho athlete guys," Steiner said.

Some of the passes along the route top out at 12,000 feet. "So all these old ladies doing it was kind of a different angle!"

While they may all be a decade or two (or three) older than the average Great Divide biker, the Gnarly Old Broads clearly don't let a little thing like 12,000-foot-high rides or gun-toting campers get between them and their cosmos.

**"THERE
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DINNERS
EVERY
NIGHT!"**

CAROL KNIGHT

IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM IDAHO'S MOMS

JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR PATTI MURPHY SELECTS SOME FAVORITE 'MOMISMS' FROM HER DEBUT BOOK.



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"IF YOU SWALLOW YOUR GUM, YOUR BUTT CHEEKS WILL STICK TOGETHER."
DORI GARBER, MOTHER OF TABATHA SIMMONDS

"YOU'RE RUNNING AWAY? LET ME HELP YOU PACK."
BETTY MURPHY, MOTHER OF PATTI MURPHY, AUTHOR

"YOU CAN CRY ANYWHERE— IT MIGHT AS WELL BE IN A HOT TUB."
DEBBIE CAPERTON, MOTHER OF LEAH SANTARONE

"AND WHO DO YOU THINK DID THAT FOR YOU? THE LAUNDRY FAIRY?"
SHIRLEY DONEY, MOTHER OF RACHEL DONEY ABRAHAMSON

"YOUR CAT WENT TO A NICE FAMILY WITH A FARM."
LOUISE MOORE, MOTHER OF DIANA LINK

"HONEY, IF A GIRL HAS A BLACK DRESS, A PASSPORT AND A TRUCK, THERE'S NOT MUCH SHE CAN'T DO."
DOLORES ROSIO, MOTHER OF KARA ROSSEAUX

THOUGHT-PROVOKING ONES

"KEEP YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND."
MOTHER OF ASTRONAUT BARBARA MORGAN

"BEWARE OF THE BOY WITH THE AMAZING EYES."
PAMELA LINK, MOTHER OF ASHLEY PEARSON

"YOU COULD BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PEACH IN THE WORLD, BUT SOME PEOPLE DON'T LIKE PEACHES. THEY LIKE BANANAS."
JOANNE MCNEVIN CLAUS, MOTHER OF JOANNE TAYLOR

"NOTHING GOOD HAPPENS AFTER MIDNIGHT."
PAMELA LINK, MOTHER OF ASHLEY PEARSON

SOME THAT JUST MAKE NO SENSE

"IF YOU LAUGH AND CRY AT THE SAME TIME, YOU'LL GROW HAIR ON YOUR BUTT."
MYONG CHANG, MOTHER OF MIAH STRADLEY

"THIRTY DAYS HAS SEPTEMBER, APRIL, JUNE AND NO WONDER, ALL THE REST HAVE PEANUT BUTTER, EXCEPT FOR GRANDMOTHER, SHE RIDES A BICYCLE."
CHRISTINE HAIGHT JOHNSON, MOTHER OF KATHERINE JOHNSON

"SHRIMP TAILS ARE POISONOUS."
NORMA SHARPE, MOTHER OF NANCY SHARPE

PICK UP 'MOTHER'

"Mother knows Best" is available at local bookstores. Proceeds from the sale of the book benefit the Women's and Children's Alliance, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary of helping victims of abuse and sexual violence. Murphy is now working on a national version of "Mother Knows Best" and has collected "momisms" from nearly every state in the country.

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Lari Lee Davis-Dolan



Rochelle Runge

Photo by Vincent Sisilli



Kathy Crosson



Paula Proctor

THE DOYENNES OF SUN VALLEY FASHION

THESE FIVE WOMEN HAVE EACH SPENT OVER 20 YEARS DRESSING THE LADIES OF THE WOOD RIVER VALLEY. VALLEY WOMAN SAT DOWN WITH THESE PIONEERS OF LOCAL FASHION TO GET SOME INSIGHT INTO THE MANY VAGARIES OF STYLING THE WOMEN OF SUN VALLEY.

BY ROBIN SIAS
PHOTOS BY ROLAND LANE

Fashion is ephemeral, highly personal, subjective. Fashion in the Wood River Valley is all that, and then some. It's timeless with a twist, practical yet pretty. What valley women wear complements their healthy lifestyles and beautiful surroundings, but it must also withstand the elements. It's not always easy to look great while enjoying the mountain lifestyle, but the women of the Wood River Valley do.

Though many spend the majority of their time in workout clothes, there is certainly more to *prêt-a-porter* in the Wood River Valley than the ubiquitous Lycra and fleece.

Five local women have been defining Sun Valley style for locals and visitors alike at their boutiques, cumulatively, for nearly 120 years. Deborah Burns (Burnsies), Kathy Crosson (Panache), Lari Lee Davis-Dolan (Maggie's), Paula Proctor (Paula's Dress Shop) and Rochelle Runge (Elle Rose) have been keeping women fashionable, fabulous and forward-thinking in the mountains of Idaho for over two decades and are consequently some of the area's most successful retailers.

Each lady brings her unique sense of style and taste to the valley while riding the ever-changing waves of a resort retail industry with grace and aplomb.

Deeply entrenched in an industry subject to both the vagaries of fashion and the economy, the longevity of these businesses is something to be commended and studied.

The successful equation for all these businesswomen appears to be a clear vision, an infallible adherence to their personal taste and a passion for what they do. While always looking for ways to introduce trends into the valley and keep it current, they heed the adage that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

"To me, Sun Valley style is a beautiful cashmere sweater, great jeans and a great pair of boots in the winter," Crosson said. "In summer, everyone wears pretty, colorful dresses and great sandals or white jeans with a flowing top. It's simple and elegant."

Understanding Sun Valley style and local women allows these vanguards of valley fashion to stay fashion-forward while keeping true to their vision. Each translates the local sensibility differently, but all agree that the

women who live here want to look great, whatever their style.

Paula Proctor, the eponymous owner of Paula's Dress Shop in Hailey, has been dressing local ladies for more than 30 years. Her career began in the late 1970s at the Trail Creek Village location, and her early lines featured the French country look, with cinched waists and gypsy blouses.

"It was so much fun," Proctor said with a laugh. "Buying trips were to Paris and we held fashion shows at the La Provence Restaurant across the way. It was very glamorous!"

But evolution was inevitable, and Paula attributes her success to an ability to reinvent and revitalize her lines. Beginning in the 1990s, she transitioned to a shop that specializes in dresses.

"They are flattering and versatile—you put one on and you're ready," she said.

Dresses work well for her customers who rely on Proctor to make them look polished for work or elegant for a benefit.

Burns, or Burnsie as she is known, opened her first Ketchum storefront in 1979. For her, the key to retail longevity is paying attention to how people dress and helping them do it better. To look good despite a climate that can call for a puffy coat in the morning and a T-shirt by afternoon calls for lots of layering, an emphasis on active wear and what she calls "Ketchum After Dark." "Active, colorful and livable," is how Burnsie describes the valley's style needs yesterday, today and in the future.

All the doyennes agree that retail longevity hinges on outstanding customer service. Many of the shoppers who come through their doors are greeted by name and directed to new arrivals that may be from their favorite designers, a style similar to something they've purchased before, or to a piece that the owner simply thinks the client will fall in love with. Customers they don't know personally get the same attention, which builds trust and keeps ladies coming back for more.

"My favorite thing to do is to style someone from head to toe," said Runge, who has sold some of the most distinctive names in fashion at Elle Rose for more than 20 years. "There's nothing better than completing an outfit



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“We make sure we get our ladies into the right dress,” Proctor said. “We pride ourselves on not selling someone something they don’t look great in. We’ve done all the editing and can help make appropriate and flattering selections for work, daytime or special events.”

Davis-Dolan, who has run Maggie’s in the Galleria building in Ketchum for 23 years, agreed that honesty is why her customers trust her and keep coming back.

“I have no problem saying, ‘That just doesn’t suit you at all—we can do better!’” she said.

At Panache, which has been in business for more than 30 years, customer service extends to sending boxes of clothes to part-time residents.

“We select pieces from our latest season and send them out,” Crosson said. “They can try them on and keep what works.”

FACES BEHIND THE WINDOWS

In the changing world of fashion, the one consistent in each of these stores has been the real woman behind the facade. What differentiates these boutiques from many big-city establishments is that you will find Paula Proctor at Paula’s and Deborah Burns at Burnsies. Rochelle Runge, Kathy Crosson and Lari Lee Davis-Dolan are the faces behind the window displays at Elle Rose, Panache and Maggie’s. The stores’ reputations are inextricably linked to their owners. Chances are, on any given day, the proprietor of each boutique will be there offering insight and details that only they can provide on the merchandise that they so painstakingly selected. Shopping at the area’s boutiques is as much about the experience as the clothing and accessories.

“The real heart of my attachment to the fashion business is my clientele. I love having a true boutique where with each piece I order I have my specific customers in mind,” said Burns.

“I am the buyer, the merchandiser, the sales person, the bookkeeper, you name it!” Davis-Dolan said.

It’s this hands-on approach to which she attributes her success.

“It’s about service, period,” Crosson said. “We strive to be the best we can be at customer service. I’m really proud of the people who work for me—they’re amazing. Many have been with Panache for years.”

These fashion pioneers also insist on a hands-on policy when it comes to stocking their shelves. Proctor sums up her philosophy simply: “I trust my taste. I go to the shows. I can’t buy something without touching it, feeling it and seeing it for myself.”

Runge travels to New York, Paris and Italy each year and attends the runway shows.

“I love the trips because you get to see what will be available a full year ahead. Then I can plan ahead, select and edit the lines that will work in our resort town.”

She believes most looks work here. “We can easily mix athletic and elegant,” she said. “Most women here changed their look dramatically for evening, the symphony, the benefits—all of the wonderful events in this town.”

Crosson loves to go to market and trusts her years of experience when buying for the store. “I know what I like. If I have to think about it, I know it probably won’t work here,” she said. “I know how to translate for a resort town.”

But even with loyal customers, outstanding service and top-quality merchandise, resort retail is a tough industry in which to survive. Though these five women have proven formulas for success, they have had to adapt to changing times.

Proctor moved her popular Ketchum store to Main Street in Hailey when Trail Creek Village in Ketchum was sold four years ago. She said the relocation was a good business move.

“I love the small-town vibe in Hailey,” she said. “There’s a cool feel here and I get girls of all ages through the door.”

For both Crosson and Runge, the need for their businesses to adapt took the form of expansion. A few years after Elle Rose relocated from the Galleria to the Christiania building on Sun Valley Road, Runge opened a sister store next door to offer a different price point.

Panache expanded this winter, taking over a neighboring space in the Sun Valley Village despite the uncertain economy. “We just needed more room,” Crosson said. “We got to spread out a little more. It was a great business decision.”

Burns has moved storefronts four times during her tenure in the Ketchum retail world to stay at the center of the action. And while Maggie’s has been at the same location since it opened, Davis-Dolan said she’s working with customers who are, understandably, concerned about their spending.

“I’ve definitely noticed that clients have become more price conscience and value driven,” she said. “But that’s not a bad thing. It keeps me on track when selecting my lines and keeps me thinking about my customers’ needs.”

THE FUTURE FOR FASHION

Despite the economic uncertainties, fashion is a career that all would recommend to young women.

“Many of the young girls who help me at the store have gone into the fashion industry,” Burns said. “I love mentoring them. I try to help everyone who works for me understand the mechanisms of the business and cultivate their fashion instincts.”

“A small store is a great place to start working if you love fashion,” Proctor said. “You get a look at the whole operation.”

Crosson called fashion “a very viable business” for the next generation of retailers. “Wherever there are women, there will be fashion.”

Vibrant, thriving women’s boutiques are important to the overall health of the valley’s economy in many ways, beyond just keeping local women up with the latest trends.

“We all give a great deal to our local nonprofits by way of gift cards for auctions and other items,” Burns said.

Success for these women has been surprisingly simple, despite the economy. They love what they do. They work really hard. They care about their customers.

“For me, it’s more about the people than the fashion,” Davis-Dolan said. “The majority of people who shop at Maggie’s are people I would want to have over to dinner.”

“I have a very distinct vision, a passion for what I do,” Runge said. “But I also really enjoy it. We have a ball at the store.”

And it doesn’t hurt to be surrounded each day by beauty.

Despite the recent closures of two well-established valley clothing retailers, Ketchum Dry Goods and North & Co., there is still room for optimism.

“After all,” Burns said, “Fashions fade but style is eternal, and we’re always going to have our own unique style in the valley.”

As winter melts away and the snow on the mountain turns to corn, valley women begin to look longingly toward spring and what they will be wearing once the layers come off and the boots are packed away. But what’s coming to these boutiques largely mirrors the optimism of these grand dames of Sun Valley fashion. A riot of color, bold prints and lady-like chic are all part of what’s about to be trendy in Ketchum.



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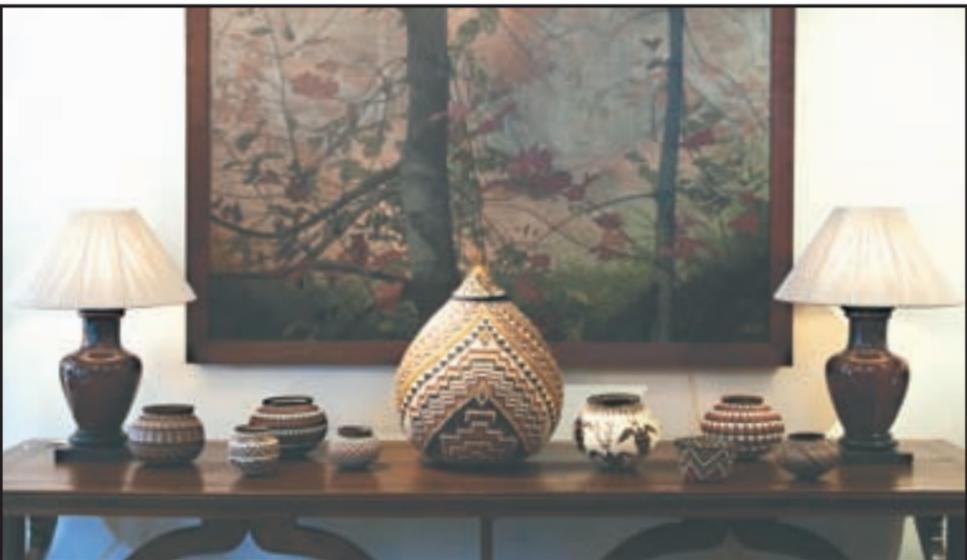
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Lori McNee sends out a tweet at Perry's restaurant in Ketchum. "It's pretty isolated being in my studio," she said. "It's nice to get out."

MIXED MEDIA

WHEN THE ECONOMY STALLED HER REAL WORLD CAREER,
FINE ARTIST LORI MCNEE EMBRACED A VIRTUAL ONE.

BY REBECCA MEANY—EXPRESS STAFF WRITER
PHOTO BY ROLAND LANE

Sun Valley resident Lori McNee's challenges several years ago were the same as many people's. What she did about them changed her life.

McNee, an artist, writer and blogger, was listed as one of the 100 Most Powerful Women on Twitter, according to www.tweet.grader.com, and was featured as part of The Huffington Post's TwitterPowerhouses series.

Her initial glimpse of Twitter, however, was not auspicious.

"I didn't understand it," she said. "I thought it was silly."

Just a few short years ago, McNee went through a period of reinvention.

"I found myself divorced and an empty-nester," she said. "My life as I knew it went through a dramatic change. Instead of feeling sorry for myself, I decided to give something back."

McNee, who had been doing art in some form since an early age, began offering fine-arts tips to fellow artists and aspiring artists.

"I joined Facebook and my kids were totally upset," she recalled with a laugh.

Further web surfing led her to Twitter.

"When I started blogging, the light bulb went on and I got it," she said.

As the economy soured, being a working artist grew more challenging. Social media became increasingly valuable to McNee to showcase her work, as well as to communicate with the arts community and beyond.

"Blogging is really important for artists," she said. "It's how we show our artwork. It's how we connect. The world is going back to a direct marketing approach in business. [Customers] really want to get to know the person they're doing business with. It's returning to the marketplace, but it's online. Social media and blogging allow the artist to connect, through direct marketing, with their clients and collectors."

McNee's online presence helped her to promote herself and her work outside the resort community as the housing market, and consequently

the art market, continued to drop.

"I've been able to keep my head above water," she said. "I'm really grateful to social media."

Though a relatively recent convert to Twitter, McNee has been creating art nearly her entire life.

"My parents said I was born with a pencil in my hand," she said. "But I didn't really settle on art until I had children. My art career developed between loads of laundry and my kids' naptime. Once my kids were older, I could really devote my time to being a full-time artist."

She specializes in still-life and landscape oil paintings, and loved birds well before the Twitter bird logo caught her eye.

**"SOCIAL MEDIA
AND BLOGGING
ALLOW THE ARTIST
TO CONNECT WITH
THEIR CLIENTS AND
COLLECTORS."**

LORI MCNEE

She has been a talk show host for Plum TV and has written for publications including Artist's Magazine, Artist's & Graphic Designer's Market, Photographer's Market, and Zero to 100,000: Social Media Tips & Tricks for Small Businesses. She also serves on the board of advisors to Plein Air Magazine.

She is an exhibiting member of Oil Painters of America and Plein Air Painters of Idaho. She has been represented by Ketchum's Kneeland Gallery for the past 10 years.

"During this time, I've been fortunate to watch her work evolve to the point of excellence we see today, where her still life paintings occupy a unique niche at Kneeland Gallery, and are sought after by collectors both locally and across the country," said gallery director Carey Molter.

Though McNee has made a significant impact on social media within the arts community, she readily admits that social media have had a huge impact on her.

"I'm having the most amazing experiences on it," she said. "All of this has been made possible because of social media. It's changed my life."

Despite what social media have done for her, she's always on alert to make sure they don't bleed into every area of her life.

"One of the main challenges is time management," she said. "In order to create, you need to have quiet and [be able] to turn off. Inspiration comes when you're not distracted."

She's established a structure for herself that includes social media interaction in the mornings, physical exercise, time at a favorite lunch spot and afternoons for her art.

"Otherwise, social media is a time suck," she said.

Another potential pitfall with social media is having one's work copied, which can be hard, if not impossible at times, to prevent.

"Any time you put yourself out there, you're going to be copied if you have a quality product," she said.

McNee was the victim of artistic copyright infringement on a social networking site. Because the person who copied her artwork was traced to another country, she had little legal recourse.

Now, she uploads only low-resolution images, 72 dpi, to inhibit easy reproduction.

"You can still see the image but they can't blow it up and reproduce it easily," she said.

Though much of her interaction with the arts community online pertains to social media, at heart she is and will remain an artist.

"If I stopped painting, then I wouldn't be as authentic, plus, I love painting. I would never want to give up my painting. That comes first."

Sharing her love of art, too, will always factor into her life. She hopes to teach social media and art and stay involved in causes for social good, especially through social media channels.

"I think I'm on the path I'm supposed to be on," she said. "I'm able to give back to the community. I'm helping others through my work. That's the meaning of life, in a way."

QUICK TIPS FOR BETTER SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

McNee said two of the biggest mistakes people make while using social media to interact with people are poor relationships with their following and poor content.

"The one thing about social media is it's about sharing, not just about yourself," she said. "It's boring if all someone does is talk about themselves."

She uses the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of her content is

about her profession, other artists or related information. Just 20 percent is about her. That goes for any profession.

"What I've done in my own art niche, they can do for their own small business," she said. "It's the fastest way to market yourself. But it does take sweat equity. You reap what you're willing to sow."

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WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A WOMAN HERE?

By Willy Cook—Express Staff Photographer



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Stelchen Palmer
Longtime valley resident



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Kerstin Flavin
Valley teacher



“It’s just having such great access to all the wonderful activities outdoors and the great camaraderie among the women in the valley.”

Sharon Beckwith
Valley mom



“We’re one of the few. When I was younger and walking into The Pioneer, there were five women and 50 guys inside.”

Cindy Monge
True valley housewife



“The general energy of people that live here and the fact that women are nicer to each other here than anywhere else I’ve ever lived.”

Tara Kinsella
Ketchum skier



“I enjoy hiking in the mountains during summertime, skiing and boarding in the winter. I also love travelling, but it’s always nice to come back here to home.”

Casey Fahey
Warm Springs adventurer



“Having grown up in New York City, I love this small-town community feel. I also love having my kids grow up here in the mountains, the best playground in the world.”

Keri Dester
Ketchum restaurant manager



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woman of the year WENDY NORBOM THE LADY WITH HER HEART ON HER SLEEVE

BY JENNIFER LIEBRUM—EXPRESS STAFF WRITER
PHOTO BY ROLAND LANE

Wendy Norbom is the matriarch of mental illness in this valley.

By putting her face out front as an advocate for those dealing with mental illness, she has given a voice to those unable to speak for themselves, and she has brought beauty and authenticity, courage, grace and acceptance to those who deal with two words that for so many conjure negative images and fear.

"Here I am being interviewed for this mind-blowing thing, Woman of the Year, and I have a mental illness," she said as she pasted labels onto brochures for the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Wood River Valley chapter, of which she is executive director.

"I hope that people realize the significance of this honor, not for me, but for them, to show them they can carry on, that a diagnosis is not the end of possibility."

WHO IS THIS YEAR'S VALLEY WOMAN?

In a parallel universe to her mental health work, Wendy Wiltse Norbom, 50, is an adopted daughter with an adopted daughter, a wife, a highly regarded commercial and residential interior designer, a volunteer, a justice seeker and a proud Canadian.

She's smart, with a rich and comedic sense of the absurd. She's prone to thinking out loud, uses a light filter when it comes to her personal life and has a contagious giggle. She says "Oh gosh! Oh, sow-ree," in a deep Canuck accent, whether she's at fault or not.

The front door of the Norbom home in the Chantrelle subdivision in north Bellevue is marked with a peace sign made of colored bulbs. In the garden is a sign saying "Grow damnit." And if by chance something doesn't, well that's the spot where Wendy will put the giant inflatable beaver she's campaigning for to show her national nostalgia. No flags for this girl. She doesn't see colors or borders, and she truly believes we all—with a healthy dose of humor mixed in—can and should get along.

On her MomVan, she has a sticker reading "Eracism" and one for Barack Obama. A window shade reads "Dangerously overeducated. Caring for the health of others, isn't that a moral value?"

Inside, the Norbom home is cozy and intimate. The parlor room encourages getting comfortable, the dining room table has a condiment caddy shoved aside for the day's project. The couple's office is as sleek as any architect/designer team would have in the city. The dogs have a big backyard, but are clearly pampered inside, their designated beds luxurious and complementary to the décor.

On this afternoon, her husband, Gary, an architect, is pattering in and out of the garage ranting about how to ship Kami's promised Girl Scout cookies out of state without costing more than the cookies, and exaggerating his exasperation at his 13-year-old's sloppy bookkeeping.

"I'm going to owe a fortune!" he laments. Wendy just laughs as he exits, still muttering. Later, he emerges to summon Kami to him and embraces her while delivering the great news, "You're only \$3 off. I'm proud of you." he says.

"We're saved," Wendy cheers.

BALANCE, BLISS, ELUSIVE AT TIMES

In the mid-1990s, Wendy was a 20-something rising star in the Canadian design world, a new wife and a Big Sister. She was full-on type A, working hard and playing hard. When her husband was offered work in his home state of Idaho at the same time Wendy was hired to set up

the design department for one of the largest architectural firms in Calgary, Alberta, she opted for a long-distance marriage. Her plan was to bank a lot of savings and then think about starting a family.

"It of course didn't work out that way," she says with a laugh. "I was working from 6 a.m. to late into the night, I wasn't taking care of myself and I started having panic attacks. I had never experienced anything like it. Ultimately, they became so debilitating that I became depressed as well and decided to take some time off."

She met up with Gary in Sun Valley where he was living with a handful of roommates. Surrounded by strangers, becoming a stranger to herself, she continued to spiral until one of the roommates, the late chiropractor Tom Montgomery, encouraged her to see a doctor and she started on antidepressants.

"I didn't want to take them. I came from a very dysfunctional family, I thought they were the ones who needed pills, not me."

Still, she added talk therapy with Ketchum practitioner Sally McCollum, and slowly things began turning around.

But it was a ritual that stood out to her as having been most significant in her getting better.

"I didn't know anyone, and Gary's family was in Weiser. In my free time, I would wander around Ketchum and go into a bookstore called Main Street Bookcafe. The people there were always so kind to me, it gave me a reason, hope. It made me fight to get better because I could see the friends I could have if I did."

She and Gary decided to stay in Idaho and she launched a business that created unique gift presentations for corporate events. They began trying for a baby.

"When it wasn't happening, we started to go down that road and find out why, but I was adopted and we both always knew we would adopt, so we went with the sure thing."

They got Kamisha straight from the hospital. Wendy immediately reset her priorities, selling her business and cutting back work to devote her time to the bundle.

"It's not an 'either or.' I just kind of think my husband can take care of himself, but my child can't, yet. She is my universe and I want to share every minute of her that I have."

"She's a great kid," she says of Kami, who attends the Community School. "I've lain in bed holding her and the tears leave my eyes and it's all I ever wanted, for myself as a child, and now as her mother. I'm not so dense to think she won't be lying on a therapist's couch one day trying to undo my mothering. No one's perfect. I just do the very best I can."

She found part-time work as a personal assistant to Adam Koffler, hotelier, philanthropist and World Jewish Congress diplomat, and served as a volunteer coordinator for the Sun Valley Arts & Crafts Festival. While maintaining her sister from Big Brother Big Sister of Canada, she started vesting herself as a community volunteer. Daisy Troop leader, ChemoAngels, National Coalition for Criminal Justice Reform, Positive Partners Assistance Training and Crisis Hotline were a few of the extracurricular activities she took on.

"What moves me is social justice work. I was taught to cheer for the underdog by my dad. I was the underdog, but I was smart and that helped me grow and move forward."

Her anxiety was not gone, but it was quieted, for a while, until her husband had a stroke, making her the sole breadwinner for the family.

"It wiped us out. It was devastating financially, emotionally. We had no idea what to do next."



Wendy Norbom and her daughter, Kami, near their home in Bellevue.

LIKE A PHOENIX, KIND OF

In 2007 she met Gail Miller Wray, the president of NAMI-Wood River Valley. Wray had grant money from the Wood River Charitable Foundation and was looking to hire help for NAMI, which was needing direction to grow.

Norbom told her future employers, "If I get passionate about this, it's really going to change because that's the way I work. Once I get into something, I go deep, and if it needs fixing, nothing will stop me from trying to fix it."

The new executive director immersed herself in all things NAMI. She attended classes and conferences, earned certifications and trained to write grants and lead programming, all with the aim of turning NAMI outside of itself and into the community. She found out that a diagnosis of mental illness is as devastating to a family or an individual as cancer, but there are no get well cards for this disease.

Learning about a NAMI program called Connections, a peer-to-peer support group for people diagnosed with a mental illness, Norbom now had a specific target.

"I knew how having that bookstore to go to every day connected me to the community, even when I couldn't embrace it. I also knew what it was like to lose hope. You don't lose your core self when you experience a mental illness—you're still there, it's the piece of hope that was missing. I knew there were others who needed hope and somewhere to go."

And after many late nights and creative letter and grant writing, Norbom was able to establish Connections locally, the first of many peer-led support groups for sufferers of mental illness, their family and friends.

The Connections group launched two years ago amid an unprecedented surge in suicides in the valley. From within the group, Norbom began to better understand the urgency for a reliable community resource. She learned how suicide was almost the last decision many of those who flocked to the support group would have made had they not found the group.

The numbers gathering Monday nights at the Hailey Sun Club has grown from eight to 90 in 18 months. The NAMI-Wood River chapter has a Facebook page that Norbom updates almost hourly with research, calls for support and uplifting or funny posts. It is exclusive to NAMI participants and is a safe forum to share information.

"It's a tricky thing for me, compassion fatigue is a risk in this work," Norbom says, her phone ringing several times on a Saturday afternoon, all calls about NAMI.

"I've made mistakes and I've learned a lot and I know that as much as I want something for someone else, all I can do is be there with the tools for them to take on for themselves. To do anything else would be robbing them of their power over their destiny."

NAMI work has put all the Norboms on the front lines, selling raffle tickets, holding yard sales and, recently, running errands for actress Ashley Judd, who came to speak about her experience with mental illness as a fundraiser for NAMI. Norbom answers calls at all hours, meeting up with the distressed in coffee shops or their homes, helping them finesse the existing mental health-care system and educating them about options.

Norbom hopes that by exposing her daughter to her condition along with her successes, Kami will navigate life better. That she will be

better prepared than her mother was when unresolved childhood grief, the loneliness of being a stranger in a strange land and workaholicism collided, jerking her off the rails and into the acutely sensitive world of panic attacks and the darkness of depression.

"This journey hasn't been easy, but I truly believe that to get over what you've been through, you have to fully expose your grief without shame. By doing that, I've been able to empower people to share their stories. We need to make it acceptable to be honest about our experiences with this illness. To feel it's all right to ask for love and support when we need it."

A CHANGE IN THINKING

A concert earlier this month dedicated to the memory of Dex Gannon, a Sun Valley man who took his own life, is a significant statement about the valley's growing sensitivity on the subject of mental illness. His father, Steve Gannon, used his position with the Sun Valley Artist Series to turn a scheduled concert into a benefit. He also was behind the publication of a resource guide called "Get Help," which was handed out at the event.

There's no question that Norbom's work with NAMI prior to Dex's death had a hand in bringing mental-health issues into the open. NAMI's family-to-family course was being offered when Steve Gannon was looking for a place for answers in the wake of his loss. The enlightenment turned to activism, and momentum was gained.

She deflects any credit, praising the Gannon family for being brave enough to go public with their tragedy to help others.

"I'm incredibly grateful that they are able to come forward with their grief and make such a public statement," she said. "What I love is that people are being honest about what's going on. Do you realize we had eight suicide attempts last week alone? We have to be here for these people."

The night after the concert, where a NAMI member shared his story of having survived a suicide attempt for the first time publicly, Norbom was in the emergency room at St. Luke's Wood River with a peer with bipolar issues.

"This is why I do what I do. To see the will and strength to survive despite such a difficult path. To look for the joy when the path of the journey can bring you to your knees," she said. "To have someone who has come through run to you and hold you tight and thank you for being there. This is why I do what I do. I am so lucky, I am so blessed to know all of these special human beings."

Averting her tearful gaze for a moment she adds, "It's so odd to be talking about me as Woman of the Year when I feel I've gotten so much reward already and I am no role model. I'm flying by the seat of my pants and by the beat of my heart."

"I work really hard and yet I'm losing my house and my car has been hit three times by hit-and-run drivers. These events can truly tear you apart. I can't afford mental health care for myself, but thanks to people who believed in me, I'm able to help people. I understand their journey and their struggles because I am on that path with them."

"I think I can show people too that you don't have to be rich to do something for your community. You hear a lot in mental health circles that you have to be careful who you share your story with. But I believe it's my responsibility to share mine. And people know I'm here for them and that I really care."

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—NAMI-WOOD RIVER VALLEY—

For help with mental illness 24 hours a day call 309-1987 or visit www.nami-wrv.com. For a "Get Help" resource guide, contact St. Luke's Center for Community Health at 727-8733.

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MAGGIE BURBRIDGE
RECREATION CENTER SUPERVISOR FOR
KETCHUM PARKS & RECREATION DISTRICT

LINDA PARSONS
LABOR & DELIVERY NURSE AT ST. LUKE'S WOOD RIVER

MUFFY RITZ
FOUNDER & LEADER OF THE VAMPS

VALERIE SKONIE
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR OF WINTER FEAST FOR THE SOUL



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The Ketchum/Sun Valley Historical Society recently conducted an independent survey to determine how to inform the Wood River Valley of its programming and ask what type of programming they would like to see.

The result of the survey found that 88% of people received their information from the Idaho Mountain Express Newspaper.

After reviewing the numbers, the board of directors opted to increase their advertising in the Express which resulted in a 200% increase in visitors to the museum this summer.



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