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The Family Days
OF SUMMER



All in the Family

LOCAL BUSINESSES PROVE THAT WORK TIME AND FAMILY TIME DON'T HAVE TO BE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. BY FRANK NELSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS

Sons and daughters (the good ones, anyway) have always helped out around the house, even when the house becomes a place of business. And sometimes they choose to walk a path close to Mom's and Dad's into the business world. However it happens, the following family enterprises demonstrate the soundness of the working world's first rule: CHOOSE GOOD PARTNERS.





Thousand Oaks mother-daughter team Lisa Kraus-Rayner (right) and Lynnette Duncan infuse old-fashioned charm into the recipes and decor at Cupcakery Cupcake Bakery & Boutique.



Sparks sometimes fly between mothers and daughters, but at **Cupcakery Cupcake Bakery & Boutique** in Thousand Oaks (cupcakeryonline.com), the relationship, like the product, is very sweet indeed. “We work perfectly together,” says Lisa Kraus-Rayner, talking about her 27-year-old daughter and business partner Lynnette Duncan. “Sometimes we’re working together sixteen or seventeen hours a day. There’s no one else I could spend that amount of time with. We’re equal partners, and we get along really well.”

Duncan agrees: “We think very much alike; and on so many issues when we talk about things we find we’re on the same page. I think perhaps we’re both a little bit old-fashioned.”

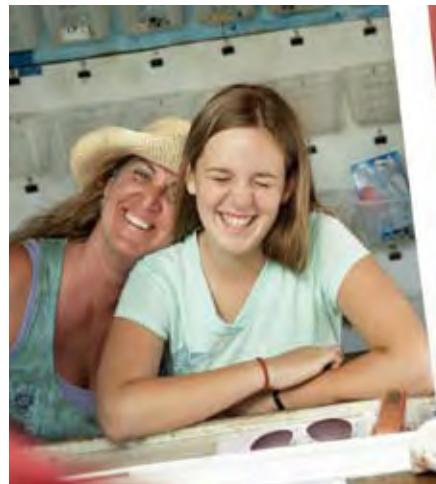
That’s not a bad thing in the bakery business, where combining some old-fashioned recipes, ingredients, and flavors is proving to be a huge hit with customers. Even the boutique area has an old-fashioned baking theme, with a popular line of vintage aprons.

Mother and daughter had been baking together for years, so it was no surprise when they decided to open this business in late 2008. First though, Kraus-Rayner spent nine months at Napa Valley’s Culinary Institute of America earning a certificate in baking and pastry. Most mornings the two are busy in the kitchen before 6 a.m., stocking the shelves with cupcakes of all designs and flavors, and filling orders for special events such as weddings, birthdays, and graduations. In early July they created the entire dessert bar for a particularly special event: Duncan’s wedding.

Ventura Boat Rentals (venturaboatrentals.com) really is a family business, with Douglas and Rochelle Cooper and their three young children all enjoying the opportunity to spend time together—working, yes, but also having lots of fun. “I call them my mini Coopers,” laughs Rochelle as she talks about her enthusiastic brood—11-year-old Hannah, sister Hailey, 9, and little brother Hayden, who’s 7.

The Coopers operate more than 50 types of craft ranging from paddleboats and kayaks to large boats that do harbor cruises and special charters, like weddings and birthday parties. They’ve also just launched a water-taxi service with four stops along a loop of Ventura Harbor.

It’s a busy life for them and their five full-time staff members, especially in the



Work time is fun time at Ventura Boat Rentals, where kids Hailey (9, top), Hannah (11, middle), and Hayden (7, bottom) help parents Douglas and Rochelle Cooper run a successful business.

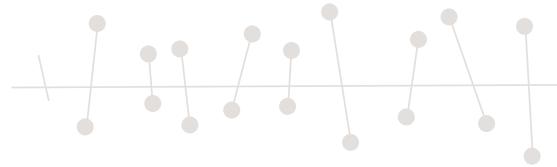
summer when those extra little hands on deck are very welcome. Hannah works mostly in the ticket office, where she feels at home selling tickets—using a cash register and credit card machines—and talking to passengers about boating rules. When she has time she joins Hailey and Hayden, whose main job is washing down boats between hires. All three also help to hand out life jackets and move small boats from dock to slip when needed.

The kids work at least 10 hours a week and have their time cards signed by their parents or other employees to show that they’ve done a good job.

“I think it’s a great idea,” says Hannah, adding that a cell phone is probably first on her shopping list when her paycheck arrives.

Sixteen-year-old twins Michael and Daniel Lacey are getting great educations at Westlake High School and Newbury Park High School, respectively. But outside the classroom they're also learning plenty about the world of business thanks to their involvement with **Crunchies Food Company** (crunchiesfood.com). For the past four years the boys have worked at their father's company after school, on weekends, and during school holidays, learning about trade shows, customer service, packing, shipping, marketing, website management, and more.

"They know the business pretty much inside out," says their dad, James Lacey, president, chief executive officer, and majority shareholder of the Westlake Village-based natural snack company.

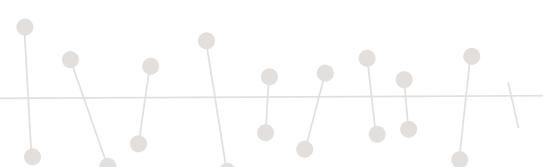


Crunchies offers a wide range of freeze-dried fruits and vegetables, which are specially processed to retain maximum nutrition and taste. The crunchy treats are sold in 5,000-plus supermarkets and stores in the United States and Canada.

By playing key roles in all aspects of the business, Michael and Daniel have matured into extremely confident and capable young men equipped with business sense and people skills well beyond their years.

James believes that a solid business foundation will serve the boys well in any future endeavors, at Crunchies or elsewhere. Michael and Daniel agree. "Attitude determines your altitude, in work and in life," says Daniel, who believes his experience at Crunchies has sharpened skills as diverse as leadership, planning, and public speaking. For Michael the main benefits have been the interaction with customers and staff members and learning to "think fast on your feet."

Twins Daniel and Michael Lacey (16) have worked at their father's natural snack food company for the past four years; Michael has learned to think fast on his feet while Daniel has honed leadership skills.





Jaide Whitman has been helping out in her family's inns since her early teens; now, at 19, she's on track to take over Ojai's **Blue Iguana Inn** and **Emerald Iguana Inn** (blueiguanainn.com, emeraldiuguana.com).

"She's probably going to carry on the business," says her mother, Julia Whitman, who currently manages the two boutique hotels. Together, they employ about 15 administration, housekeeping, and maintenance staff members.

Julia and her architect husband, Marc, designed, developed, and then opened the Blue Iguana, just west of Ojai, in 1996–97; three years later they repeated the process with the Emerald Iguana in downtown Ojai. Jaide remembers that at age 12 or 13, she was helping to design and decorate the rooms: "I was Mom's sidekick," she says. After that she became increasingly involved and by age 15 was working the front desk on some nights after school, on weekends, and holidays. After high school graduation she virtually became a full-time assistant manager alongside her mom. And now, halfway through her four years as a theater major at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, she's spending much of her summer at the hotels, where she hopes to forge her future career.

Jaide believes great customer service is crucial. "I try to find fun, exciting ways of attracting people and making sure they enjoy their stay, like [leaving] notes and flowers in the rooms, and sending thank-you emails," she says.

Julia values her daughter's artistic, creative side, plus her computer skills and familiarity with social media. "Kids are invaluable in bringing us into the modern age of technology," she says. ■

Ojai's quirky, comfortable Blue Iguana Inn and Emerald Iguana Inn were created and now managed by Julia Whitman (right); daughter Jaide (19) hopes to take over the business one day.

