

Lebanon's Women Trailblazers in Family-Owned Businesses  
By Suzanne Biever

Author Robert Spector said, "Mom & pop stores are not about something small; they are about something big. Ninety percent of all U.S. businesses are family owned or controlled. They are important for providing us with intellectual stimulation, social interaction, and connection to our communities. We must have mom & pop stores because we are social animals. We crave to be part of the marketplace."

Lebanon County has had its own long-standing tradition of family-owned and operated businesses. Wendie DiMatteo is the current CEO of ASK Foods Inc. ASK was once run by Wendie's grandfather, Abraham Shelley Kettering, and Wendie's father, Robert B. DiMatteo. At the time, the company only handled the distribution of meats and cheeses to local markets. However, they soon saw a need in the local market for deli salads as well, which they started to manufacture in the 1950s. As the company continued to grow and prosper, it eventually became incorporated under ASK Foods.

In 2016, ASK Foods celebrated its 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What makes the company so successful and unique is the fact that it is one of the only companies in the country to offer an entire product line free of preservatives and absolutely natural. Wendie has served as the CEO of the business for the past 25 years, overseeing the operations, strategic planning, and marketing of this third-generation company.

Our next featured trailblazer is Jan Herschkowitz, CEO of PRL Inc. in Cornwall. PRL Inc. offers quality sand castings for a variety of industries. Jan's father, Erwin "Herk" Herschkowitz, purchased Pennsylvania Radiographic Laboratories in 1972 and later shortened the name. PRL Inc. later purchased Brenner Machine Company in 1977, which was then consolidated with LTC, Inc.

In 1988, after a battle with cancer, Herk visited Jan in Chicago and asked if she would quit her position with Zenith Electronics Corporation to move to Cornwall and work with him at PRL Inc. Jan said yes, and was able to work with her father for five weeks before his cancer returned and he passed away a few months later. After her father's passing, Jan continued to lead the business to success, including the opening of Regal Cast, a sand foundry, in 1989.

These exceptional women noted above are only two of the many leaders of family-owned businesses in Lebanon County. There is not space enough to do credit to all of the female trailblazers of Lebanon, PA, and we extend our gratitude to all of them for all they have contributed to our community.

Other female leaders of family-owned businesses include Ruth Dietz of Ono Transportation, Marion White of White's Harley-Davidson, Holly Plummer of Paramount Sports Complex, Joan Briody and daughters of Timbers Restaurant in Mount Gretna, Jean Kotkas of Tony's Mining Company, Kathy Bishop of Lebanon Seaboard Corporation, and Shirley Rothenberg of Logan's.

Check back next week for the next installment of the Lebanon County Commission for Women's article series featuring women entrepreneurs. Additional information about the commission itself is available at [www.lebanoncounty.org/womens\\_commission](http://www.lebanoncounty.org/womens_commission).