



(L to R) April Smithback, Erin Logan, Sylvia "Sally" Borter and Cheryl Stalowski



(L to R) Francine and Melissa Ernst of Dottie Rose.

Photos by Amy Lynn Schreck

Mothers and daughters in business together

“The advantage to working with your mom is that you know everything about her. The disadvantage is also that you know everything about her!”

— Melissa Ernst,
owner of Dottie Rose

By Lesa Knollenberg

My mother and I worked together in the '80s. She owned a marketing company and hired me as her assistant. I preferred to think of myself as vice president. We ran the company out of our family home and were planning my upcoming wedding as well. Although we differed on my job title, we handled the rest with grace, I'm pleased to say. Part of our success was due to our three rules:

- On days we didn't see customers, sweat suits were allowed and hair brushing was optional.
- No wedding talk until our "Lean Cuisine" lunch.
- Mom was always right.

Working together can be a wonderful bonding experience for mothers and daughters — but fraught with challenges, too. There are many successful mother/daughter business ventures in Dane County, and they have discovered their own rules and secrets to success.

Kids are their business

Capitol Kids, a childrens' clothing, toy and bookstore in downtown Madison, is owned by **Peg Scholtes** and **Jenna Hansen**, mother and daughter. They have discovered that their differences strengthen their business decisions. Scholtes sees the big picture: "I have a tendency to be impulsive, so when making big decisions I often try to slow myself down. When it comes to the huge business decisions, Jenna's input has been invaluable. Taking risks is essential in this kind of business. Jenna is savvy and I trust her judgment. While we certainly don't always agree, having her opinions has made me more confident in my risk-taking. So far, on big issues, if we both think something is a good idea, it has turned out well."

Her daughter, Hansen, concurs. "When we don't agree, it's more personal, because we trust and respect each other's opinions in a different kind of way. Since she is the mom and boss, she wins on the big stuff. Sometimes that is hard when I want it done my way. I am a bit



(L to R) Peg Scholtes and Jenna Hansen of Capitol Kids.

of a control freak, so it's hard to back down. I have learned over the last eight years to pick my battles and let a lot go. And a lot of times, she is right...but not always!"

Generations of style

The generational mother/daughter ties are strong with **Dottie Rose**, a vintage clothing, furniture and collectibles store in Middleton. The name of the innovative store is derived from **Melissa Ernst's** two grandmothers, who influenced her style. Her mother, **Francine Ernst**, has been part of the team during the conception, opening and management of the store.

Melissa says she has learned the advantages and disadvantages of operating a retail business together. "The advantage to working with your mom is that you know everything about her. The disadvantage is also that you know everything about her!" Their talents are complementary; Melissa's vintage flair is a good match for her mother's strengths. "My mom and I get along really well — I trust her opinion and I know she trusts mine. She pitches in where needed and uses her expertise of antiques and interiors to help on buying trips and selling," Melissa adds.

Four wired women

Imagine the challenges of professional and familial ties — and double that. **TotAlly wirEd** is a shop in Paoli that specializes in unique home décor and beaded giftware, and is owned by three sisters and their mother. **Erin Logan**, the self-titled little sister, describes their success: "We are four determined

women with talents and strengths that complement one another. It is wonderful to share this experience with the three women that I admire the most. Success is twice as much fun to celebrate with them."

Her sister, **April Smithback**, admits that there are ups and some downs to a family business. "The advantages are that we get to spend time together and get to share this great adventure and sense of accomplishment. But it is hard sometimes to put the business aside and talk about something else."

Cheryl Stalowski says they have no regrets. "One day I thought — I am buying a shop in this cute little town of Paoli so my sisters can put their wired dishes in it. At the time, Mom and I didn't wire but we were their best customers ... and as the Little Red Hen would say, 'and so she did.' That was three years ago, and we never looked back. No regrets."

Does Mom **Sally (Sylvia) Borter** have any regrets? "Not for a minute," she says. "April and Erin really started the business and had been doing shows and home parties for over two years before Cheryl and April bought the shop. They already had a following, so we had some reason to believe that a shop would be successful. I think it helps that we are all fairly easy-going and we're good

communicators. We have always been free with our opinions, so it has never been a mystery what the other person is thinking."

Hard work, communication and boundaries seem to be the keys to a genetic joint venture. And equally as important: Mom is always right. Most of the time.



Lesa Knollenberg is a local freelance writer whose Mom usually is right.

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