

[PROFILE]

A Mother-Daughter Reprise

Reviving a dissolved limousine company, a female duo strives in a male-dominated industry.

By Thi Dao

In the limousine industry, there's no lack of men. There are father-son operators, brother-owned companies, and husband-wife duos. Rarely do you see mother-daughter alliances. But when Pat Christofferson and her daughter, Heidi Bunnell, both former teachers, heard about a nearby limousine company being dissolved, they bought it out. The pair established Exeter, N.H.-based Reprise Limousine in June 2008.

New to the industry, they had a lot to learn. "One of our greatest sources of information was attending the LCT Show," says Christofferson, who is vice president. There, the women made important contacts with industry professionals. Splitting up, they attended every single class, taking abundant notes and absorbing marketing tactics. Christofferson notices "how helpful all the people who attended these conferences are [in] willing to help someone new."

Despite being welcomed at the LCT show, they endured some rude responses about being women in the business. "When we first started, there were some affiliates thinking I was a secretary, thinking that we were just these girls answering the phone," says Bunnell, president of Reprise. At the gas station, a stranger

commented on her filling her boss' vehicle. He was stunned to find that it was her vehicle — and she was the boss.

Regardless, Bunnell and Christofferson find themselves promoting the fact that theirs is a female-owned company much more than they hide it, emphasizing attention to customer service and the ability to bring a "nicer touch" to the company.

Bunnell, who was always involved in the local school and in politics, found that her connections gave her event shuttling jobs. Christofferson's talkative personality, which always had embarrassed her daughter when she was younger, became an asset, as she was able to easily make more contacts. "I have gone through the main streets of Exeter and met everyone and talked to everyone," she says. In addition, they go to events, stop by at businesses, travel agencies, and AAA to market Reprise.

Joining the Exeter Chamber of Commerce has led to a boost in business. "It's our biggest asset because it's a very active chamber," Christofferson says. They donate gift certificates at chamber events. The chamber hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to honor their membership.

Being the only limousine company in

a town that has a large business community, 85% of Reprise's business is corporate. Its rates are competitive and it offers easy payment through flat-rate billing that includes tax and gratuity. Chauffeurs will sometimes receive gratuities on top of the billed price.

Family support has been an important asset — everyone has a part to play. Christofferson "does more of the talking," says Bunnell, who takes care of reservations. Paul Christofferson, Pat's husband, often watches his grandchildren while the women are at the office, and does mechanical work for the fleet. Bunnell's three children, ages five, eight, and 10, help out around the office, emptying trash and restocking shelves.

The women explained their company name: "We were taking the asset of the company that was done not so well, and we decided to improve upon it," Christofferson says. The second time around, it's been a hit. **LCT**

INFO REPRISE LIMOUSINE

LOCATION: Exeter, N.H.
OWNERS: Heidi Bunnell and Pat Christofferson
SERVICE TERRITORY: New Hampshire and surrounding states
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 9 months
TYPES OF VEHICLES: Town Cars, sedans, executive vans, SUV, cab
CHAUFFEURS: 1 full-time, 5 part-time
OFFICE STAFF: 2
ESTIMATED ANNUAL REVENUE: \$200,000 to \$300,000
PHONE: (603) 770-9091
WEBSITE: www.repriselimo.com

■ Pat Christofferson and Heidi Bunnell, co-owners of Reprise Limousine, plan on teaming up with The Exeter Inn to offer package deals.

