

FYI

BAND OF BOUTIQUES ... Score one for the small, locally owned business. In typical entrepreneurial fashion, a scrappy group of downtown Palo Alto specialty shops has united under the banner of Palo Alto Downtown Boutiques' Association. To celebrate, the group is hosting an al fresco fashion show, IN STYLE Palo Alto, set for Saturday, June 9 on Bryant Street between University and Hamilton avenues. The inaugural event will benefit the Downtown Streets Team and will feature the latest from Bloom Buitik, Charmosa, Far East Living, Fashion Passion, Gitti's Fine Lingerie, Hot Mango Pickle and Vian Hunter. For more information, go to www.boutiquesonbryant.com/instylepaloalto.com.

FACING MYSPACE ... Palo Alto's Facebook, a social-networking site popular with the college crowd and beyond, declared its pages open for business last Thursday. By sharing its screen space with Microsoft, Amazon, Forbes.com and more than 60 others, Facebook is giving the businesses access to its more than 24 million users. Reports predict Facebook will eventually boost profits by processing the transactions for hosted businesses. The blogosphere was buzzing Friday morning with speculation that the move could ultimately position Facebook to unseat the reigning social-networking king, Myspace, which currently boasts 100 million unique accounts.

LIVE, FROM SPACE ... Palo Alto's Space Systems/Loral was recently awarded a contract to build a communications satellite for SES Global which will allow telecommunications providers, broadcasters, corporations and governments to beam content and information around Europe, Africa, the Middle East, India and other areas of Asia. Named the NSS-12, the spacecraft will eventually hover high above the earth over the Indian Ocean. The craft will be assembled in Palo Alto, with a completion date of 2009.

FYI is a regular feature announcing news and events related to the Palo Alto business community. Send news to In Business editor Allen Clapp at aclapp@paweekly.com.

In Business

A monthly section on local business news and trends, edited by Allen Clapp



Dan Garber discusses work with his wife Catharine at their architectural firm, the Fergus Garber Group.

Marian Sadoughi

WIVES TAKING THE SPOTLIGHT AND THE HUSBANDS WHO WORK FOR THEM

by Susan Hong

"I work for my wife," said Dan Garber, architect and Palo Alto planning commissioner. He often says that to people he meets for the first time.

"I think you say that because it's amusing to others, and partly because I started the firm," said architect Catharine Garber of their Palo Alto-based architectural firm called Fergus Garber group.

"I'd say that we're an anomaly," Dan said.

It's an interesting scenario for 21st Century America. In fact, the idea of husbands working for wives is so new that there is very little research on these kinds of working relationships. But with the scenario of Hillary Clinton as President and Bill as First Man edging closer to reality, it

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Lisa Hunter and husband Scott help a customer at their clothing boutique, Vian Hunter in downtown Palo Alto.



Kelly Cox

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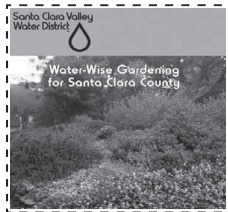


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Wives

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may be something we hear more about in the near future.

Women-owned businesses have grown twice as fast as the national average, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration. The country now has 7.7 million firms that are more than 50 percent owned by women. Women-owned businesses account for 29.7 percent of all business in the United States and generate \$1.1 trillion in annual sales.

California leads the pack with women running 31.5 percent of all privately held firms in the state.

Although Catharine started the firm, she wants to make it clear that she thinks of her working relationship with her husband as a partnership. They jointly and equally own the firm, but it's clear she's taken the lead.

Catharine's maiden name, "Fergus," comes before Garber in the firm's name. On their Web site, Catharine's picture is in the first position. She's also the founder. "The firm is built around Catharine and the way she designs and the things that are interesting to her," Dan added.

"The firm already had a type of work that it did and a certain sense about it," Catharine said. "I think Dan's been sensitive not to change the nature of the firm too much from that vision."

Catharine started the firm in 1987, working out of the family's home in Chicago. After working in the corporate world, Dan formally joined Catharine's firm in 2000.

The two have been married 20 years.

"She thinks of us as being equals as opposed to me being in a subordinate position," Dan added.

"I think what friends find surprising is that a husband and wife can spend so much time together," Catharine said.

In fact, they enjoy the partnership. "For me it was being in a work environment with people I know and in this case, love," Dan said.

The feeling is reciprocal. "It was a relief to have him because I didn't want to be managing other people. It gave me the confidence to grow the company and hire more people. He's been really helping to steer the growth of the company," she said and turned to Dan. "It's not like you're following in my footsteps."

"I get to do my own thing," Dan said, "and support Catharine and that's pretty great."

Working together has given the couple an advantage.

"It's actually benefited the family and it's better for the business. Financially you're better off," he said.

Several blocks away from Fergus

Garber Group, another up-and-coming couple, Lisa and Scott Hunter, set up a new clothing boutique called Vian Hunter in Palo Alto this year. In a style reminiscent of 1950s and 1960s elegance, the store sells Lisa's designs.

"I'm in charge of everything to do with designing and production," Lisa said. Her husband Scott, whom customers will often find in the store on Bryant Street, sells the clothes, and handles marketing, advertising and publicity, Lisa said. The two jointly own the business and see their working relationship on equal footing.

"We love it," Scott said.

Lisa agrees. "It's a family affair."

But when it comes to creative license, "there's a fine line with husbands and wives working together," Lisa said. There were some tensions in putting together their storefront, Lisa said. She had an idea of what she wanted and Scott had an idea of what it should look like. In the end, Scott said Lisa's vision brought it together.

"She really has figured out what people want and it's really about getting the word out to people now. Everybody who comes in here and sees her designs — from the moment she started doing custom work after getting her fashion degree to the present — is extremely positive. I really think she's hit on something that people want," Scott said.

The couple has been married for 19 years and have two children who attend Palo Alto High School.

This isn't the first time they've worked together.

From 1995 to 2000 when they worked together on a music magazine Scott ran, Lisa provided managerial support. "That was his passion," she said. "I love rock music. But that was his dream, and I was part of it. He was the one being interviewed, he was creating the magazine, and that was fine for me."

Two years later at the age of 39, Lisa achieved her dreams of completing a degree in fashion. She made custom designs for clients while Scott worked on a business plan.

"It's different," Lisa said of her new role as a designer and figurehead for the line. "This is my passion. It's his passion too, but I get to design, which is great."

Scott is in total support.

"We're in the groove. We're bonded. We're looking at trying to have a successful business through this," Scott said.

"What's unique — pretty much all the creative stuff is her burden this time," Scott said.

"We expect that to continue on for infinity." ■

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