

Atlanta INTown

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Business Women IN The City

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LARAIN DEVENIE, 59

Owner, La Raine's Bridal Boutique
853 North Highland Ave., Virginia-Highland



SUSAN SOPER

When she was a teenager, Laraine Devenie's parents moved the family from Long Island to New Zealand, a place that still feels like home to her. She goes back to visit every year. In business, she began doing art shows, selling her handcrafted wicker and evolved to owning a gift store at Phipps Plaza in 1989. When she moved to Galleria Mall, she sold clothing and moved the boutique to St. Charles Avenue in Virginia-Highland. The bridal business began with a small rack of informal wedding gowns, which went so well they took over the business. Last year, she bought the building that formerly housed Harvest restaurant, renovated it and moved the shop in just before Christmas. On a mantel in her shop are three wedding photographs: her mother in a navy blue suit; her mother-in-law in a blue dress; and herself in a "very pink" dress she was married in 40 years ago. She lives in Marietta with her husband, Bill, and their Shih Tzu, Jackson, 4.

Best career advice you got: A long time ago I had an accountant tell me you either have to sell more or buy less.

Best career advice you give: Never quit... pursue your dreams.

Advice to brides: Do whatever makes you

happy.

Three adjectives your employees would use to describe you: Outgoing, charming, stubborn.

Your management style: Very hands-on. I don't expect anybody to do anything I don't do.

Best perk of owning your own business: I have total control, set my own hours, and can bring my dog.

What keeps you organized: My husband keeps me on track, not organized. He's believed in me when no one else did.

How you unwind: I don't sit still very often. I do like yard work, building brick walls, patios and doing concrete work. I use chainsaws; I love power tools.

How you dress for work: I'm not stuffy and don't wear suity-looking things, but nothing that would shock a grandmother.

Morning ritual: For the last 40 years my husband brings me coffee in bed and the paper.

Workout routine: Up and down the stairs in the shop.

Best attribute: I'm very good at visualizing. I'm quick on my feet.

Least favorite thing about yourself: I'm a workaholic.

On weekends: Saturday and Sunday are our busiest days. I work in the yard on Mondays.

On your nightstand: The crossword puts me to sleep at night.

Favorite restaurant: Sapporo Japanese.

Something that changed your life: My husband did. He's been my encouragement.

Would you bungee jump? No, but I would hang glide.

All-time favorite movie: *An Affair to Remember*.

Something about you most people don't know: I've built all the brick walls in my gardens.

If you won the lottery: Pay off this house [La Raine's]. I'd still work.

Something you collect: Swarovsky Christmas ornaments.

Favorite junk food: I eat candy bars, a lot of them. Twix and I love turtles.

Most treasured piece of art: The ornaments my kids made when they were little.

CATHERINE SIMPSON, 40

Owner, Catherine's Auto Repair Inc.
1916 Piedmont Cir. and 1172 Northside Dr.



NATALIE THAVENOT

After 12 years at The Westminster Schools and graduation from Georgetown University, Catherine Simpson headed west. She worked as a teen counselor in Seattle – she says she could have been a high school math teacher – and then learned about cars in a trade course for women. That was when the idea first hit her: Wouldn't it be great to open an auto repair shop that people felt good about? When she returned to Atlanta, she worked as a mechanic for a few years and took some business classes until she was ready to go on her own. That was in 2000, and now there are two repair shops. There is also her 16-month old daughter, Camryn, whom she puts in a jogger-stroller to run to the park. The best perk of owning her own business: being able to play with Camryn in the morning and do paperwork at midnight.

Very first job: Office assistant when I was 13 for A Woman's Place, a feminist organization co-founded by my mother.

Best career advice you got: You shouldn't be doing this; you're never going to make it. Said to me by several mechanics over the years, which just made me that much more determined that I was going to make it!

Three adjectives your employees would use to describe you: On the record:

caring, fair, strong; off the record: obsessive, frazzled and always late.

How you dress for work: Jeans and T-shirts – clothes that are OK getting grease on them.

A word of advice: Follow your dream, but allow your heart to take you on a detour when needed.

Favorite clothing: My pajamas.

Best advice from your mother or father: If you don't know what to do, just get in there and stir the pot, and something will come to you. If it turns out not to be the right path, you can make a course correction and keep on going.

Can't live without: Chocolate, tea, hiking boots, my guitars – and, of course, family.

On your nightstand: *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* by John Gottman and *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* by Kim Edwards.

Favorite restaurant: Café Sunflower.

Favorite vacation spot: Hiking almost anywhere out west.

Recent CDs: Ani DiFranco, Brandi Carlile, Joan Osborne, Lucinda Williams.

Something about you most people don't know: That I'm absolutely terrified of public speaking, even though I've done it a lot.

How you give back to the community: I have given time and money to The Atlanta Women's Foundation, The Destiny Fund, Atlanta Habitat for Humanity Women Build, Cool Girls, The Sierra Club's Inner-City Outings and miscellaneous political campaigns.

Favorite ice cream flavor or junk food: Soy Delicious Cookies Avalanche and Whole Foods' Vegan Chocolate Mousse.

Favorite heirloom: My great-aunt's piano.

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