

# WOMEN with VISION

MEET 6 VAIL VALLEY WOMEN WHO ARE RUNNING THEIR OWN BUSINESSES

Weekly staff report  
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While female-owned businesses are becoming more common, the women who run them are anything but ordinary. They are innovative, entrepreneurial and driven — qualities that are essential to running a successful business in a rural area such as the Vail Valley where living costs are skyrocketing and the availability of quality employees is dropping. That being said, these six women make it work every day — and their companies are flourishing. Their expertise covers catering, writing, event planning, transportation, floral arrangements and graphic design and they are all longtime residents. Each started their businesses for different reasons, but they are all glad they did and encourage others to do the same. Here are their stories.

## CHELSEA DICKENS RUSTIC FARM TO FORK

Regardless of where a person lives or where they are from, food is always a topic of conversation. What people eat and the way food is presented is important, which is why Rustic Farm to Fork owner Chelsea Dickens decided it was time to do things her way. “People eat with their eyes, so presentation is everything,” she said. “Food allows for conversation and bonding — in fact one of my favorite things to do is to go out to dinner and have great conversation with my company and the person serving us.”

Approaching her 11th winter as an Eagle County resident, Dickens spent years managing and working in restaurants all over the Vail Valley. In January 2017, she launched



Rustic Farm to Fork because she wanted to provide healthy, home-cooked meals for her customers. What started as strictly take-and-bake meals quickly emerged into running several school lunch programs and a full-on catering business that includes private dinners at people's homes.

“Being from Virginia, I have a southern approach to food — and by that, I mean I strongly believe that food is for your soul,” Dickens said. “I started this business because I wanted to share my Virginia favorites with the valley. I was ready to go out on my own and decided, after a lot of thought and encouragement, that it was time to do this on my own. And I have no regrets.”

Although Rustic Farm to Fork is thriving, Dickens continues to run into issues experienced by other Vail Valley business owners — good help is hard to find. Luckily her friends and family have been able to step in to assist with deliveries, administrative duties and serving at parties. She says it's all worth it when she sees her clients' reactions after eating the food she prepares.

“I have grown so much because of the people around me and their support. I managed a local Edwards restaurant for five years where I met so many people who are now Rustic Farm to Fork customers,” Dickens said. “One of my favorite aspects of having my own business is being able to cook for those people instead of just handing them a to-go bag. It's rewarding that they are trying my food and coming back again and again.”

For more information, visit [www.rusticfarmtofork.com](http://www.rusticfarmtofork.com).

## LAURA LIEFF LIEFF INK

After spending many years commuting to the Vail Valley from both Boulder and Denver, in September 2013, Laura Lieff decided to make Edwards her home. Bringing over a decade of professional writing experience, seven of which were spent as a newspaper writer and editor, she now operates Lieff Ink, her writing, editing and public relations business.

“Everyone needs a skilled writer and editor to ensure they are effectively getting their message across,” says Lieff. “Whether that's through website content, cover letters or press releases, words always matter and it's my job to make sure those words are well-written.”

Her scope of writing covers a variety of platforms — including restaurant menus, speeches, brochures, pamphlets and advertising content for various publications. She also works well with graphic designers who build websites around the content she creates.

When she's not writing and editing for her clients, Lieff is working with college students at Colorado Mountain College in Edwards where she is an English and writing tutor and teaching assistant. She also specializes in helping high school seniors with their college entrance essays.

“Applying my journalist background to teaching college students has been very rewarding,” Lieff says. “They work extremely hard to advance their writing abilities and it's exciting to show the next generation that writing has and will always be an important skill.”

Originally from Miami, where her family owned and operated a chain of record stores, Lieff grew up with a CEO mother who broke barriers in the business world as a female running a public company. She credits her mother for teaching her that women and men are equal in all aspects of the world and that being your own advocate is imperative to running a successful business. Lieff also credits her mother for her passion for music.

She adds, “I love music because my mom loves music. My grandfather loved music. Growing up in record stores is something so special to me and was clearly a moment in time. Some of my students have never owned a CD and certainly have never shopped in a record store.”

In addition to Lieff Ink and Colorado Mountain College, Lieff co-hosts a weekly radio show called “Bite the Bullet” on Friday nights from 6 to 8 p.m. on 107.9 Radio Free Minturn.

For more information, visit [www.lauralieff.com](http://www.lauralieff.com).



## MARGUERITE MCEVOY EVENTS BY MARGUERITE

A Vail Valley resident since 2011, Marguerite McEvoy moved to the mountains to begin her career in event planning. After working at a few venues in Eagle County, she decided it was time to work for herself and founded Events By Marguerite in June 2018.

“I wanted to bring my client to the venue instead of waiting for the client to come to me,” McEvoy said. “I also wanted to be more involved in the entire planning and design process and to expand my clientele.”

Specializing in a wide array of events including birthday parties, corporate events, bridal and baby showers, housewarming parties and proposals, McEvoy's services include venue sourcing and site selection, contract negotiations with vendors, food and beverage consulting, and invitation and menu design.

Although there are clearly positive and negative aspects of running an event planning business, McEvoy says the best part is connecting with her clients on a deeper level than she did when she ran an event venue.

“It is a new experience with a huge learning curve. This is my first business so everything is a new challenge from acquiring a business license to marketing myself,” she said.

Hailing from Atlanta, McEvoy appreciates the mountain lifestyle she's become accustomed to — especially the “work to live versus the live to work attitude.” An avid skier and hiker, McEvoy loves the weather, the views and the summer and winter activities the Rocky Mountains have to offer.

In terms of events, she has discovered that people love coming to the Vail Valley to vacation



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and celebrate.

“Weddings, holiday parties, life milestones — it all happens right where we live which makes it a great place for hospitality and event businesses,” she said. “The entire town is a scenic backdrop so with any event you can use the space nature has provided or you can dress it up to create an entire new world with a tent, production company and decor.”

When asked what she would say to women who are contemplating starting their own business, McEvoy does not hesitate with her three things to keep in mind:

- 1) Do it.
- 2) Have a good support system.
- 3) Do your research.

To learn more, visit [www.eventsbymarguerite.com](http://www.eventsbymarguerite.com).

## LYNNEA PILLSBURY RIDE TAXI

After spending several years state-jumping, Eagle Valley High School alumna Lynnea Pillsbury moved back home in 2012. Over the years she has occupied several roles in the education field, including key account executive for Trident University International. In 2015, after years of effort and persistence, Pillsbury and her husband Nash launched Ride Taxi, a locally-owned and operated taxi service.



By combining Nash's years of taxi management experience and her background in public relations and account management, the husband-and-wife team achieved what was previously impossible.

They acquired a taxi license in Eagle County. “The road to achieving our taxi license through the Colorado Public Utilities

Commission was certainly not a smoothly paved one; in fact, it was laden with obstacles, trials and tribulations,” Pillsbury said.

One of the most challenging aspects of Ride Taxi is that the company, in compliance with its license, operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. In short, they never close which means Pillsbury is always on call. But she and her husband agree that one of the best parts about running a transportation company is having a platform upon which to positively impact their community.

“Our entire team lives and works here in the valley, and one of our core values is to ‘support local,’” she said. “From the hats on our drivers' heads to the decals on our cabs, we strive to source locally whenever possible.”

As for the pressures of running a business, Pillsbury says “the best and most difficult aspects of being a business owner are one in the same: you're in charge of it all. And feeling the gravity of that responsibility can be overwhelming at times.”

While Ride Taxi is a family business that Pillsbury co-owns with her husband, she is aware of the significance of being a woman in charge.

“It certainly is empowering to see the mainstream media making more space in the spotlight for women in business and leadership sectors,” she said. “That said, I would be thrilled to see a shift in the conversation. I want to hear more about diverse and fresh practices that have led other business owners to realize their goal no matter the gender.”

Pillsbury's advice for women considering going into business on their own: “Do it. Trust in your vision. Hustle. Stay kind.”

For more information, visit [www.ridetaxivail.com](http://www.ridetaxivail.com).

## FRANKIE SHERIDAN

FANCY PANSY

Similar to many Eagle County locals, Frankie Sheridan's original plan was to move to the mountains for “one or two years” and then “definitely” move back to Denver. Fifteen years later, Sheridan has become a fixture in the community.

A Colorado native, she initially moved to the Vail Valley in 2003 in an effort to further her career in risk management. After a decade of working for Vail Resorts, she decided it was time to pursue her passion of working with flowers. For several years she worked out of her garage, making floral arrangements for small events and various customers. Then in 2016 she decided it was time to make floral design her full-time career.



In December 2017, she opened Fancy Pansy, which is located across from City Market and next to Columbine Bakery in Avon. Sheridan says the best part of owning a flower shop is making beautiful arrangements for people who love flowers as much as she does.

“Flowers always put a smile on people's faces and I really enjoy having a part in that,” she said.

Having said that, she acknowledges that there is a learning curve when running your own business.

“There's a lot to understand and absorb when it comes to accounting, anticipating what customers want and balancing the right amount of perishable product in the shop at all times,” Sheridan said. “Sometimes it feels like every day is a gamble but it's worth it and I know it will get easier with time.”

Open less than a year, Fancy Pansy is already a local favorite. Known for crafting unique floral designs for weddings, restaurants and special occasions, Sheridan has created a space that is extremely inviting — just the way she envisioned it.

So far, she feels that being a female business owner during this time and in this valley is something extraordinary. She points out that even though “it's challenging and there are definitely sacrifices that have to be made, having the opportunity to take a chance like this with the support of this community is amazing.”

To learn more, visit [www.fancy-pansy.com](http://www.fancy-pansy.com).

## JENA SKINNER JS DESIGNS

Although Jena Skinner is currently splitting her time between Denver and Eagle County, she has been a resident for almost 20 years. In 2013, she started JS Designs — a graphic design company that focuses on affordably helping her customers. Skinner specializes in crafting new logos and fixing old ones, restoring photos, updating and maintaining social media pages and creating new websites, brochures and posters.



“Design needs are important but can be very onerous for people,” Skinner said. “I'm happy to use my skills to provide alternatives to Do It Yourself logos and websites, among other design services.”

During a time when women are getting more publicity than ever before, Skinner hopes that females occupying professional roles becomes the norm. She also says that rather than thinking of herself as a female business owner, she prefers to think of herself as someone doing her best to succeed in the Vail Valley who happens to be female.

“I believe the best teams in the world are comprised of both males and females, as our way of thinking balances the male way of thinking,” Skinner said. “Hopefully one day the subconscious belief that women are limited

and can only fulfill certain roles is forgotten. I hope someday I am also not surprised to find myself working with a female peer, and to see that employers have absolutely no fear regarding gender — or any other difference whether it be racial or cultural — in the workplace, or in professional and leadership roles.”

Her advice for women who are thinking about going out on their own is to “be honest, pick your battles and be steadfast with your business. People will respond to the energy you put forth, and those who appreciate your skills and talents will be loyal to your business — no matter what it is.”

Skinner also emphasizes the importance of teaching the next generation that the world needs people who bring balance and community to the world.

If Skinner looks familiar for reasons outside of graphic design, it might be because she sings and plays various instruments for the bluegrass band Hardscrabble. Formed in 2008, the five-piece band performs all over Eagle County, as well as in Aspen, Grand Junction and Summit County, among other areas of Colorado.

For more information, visit [www.jsdvail.com](http://www.jsdvail.com).