

RED BANK'S FIRST LADY OF LANDSCAPING



*Karen Siciliano, seen at Riverside Gardens Park, is celebrating her company's 75th year in business.
(Photo by Dustin Racioppi;)*

By DUSTIN RACIOPPI

Something isn't quite right inside Karen Siciliano's Park Street office.

It isn't the collection of framed awards and flattering magazine and newspaper stories tacked on the wall. It's not the picture of her cockapoo, Geli, on her desk. Nor is it the scent of gasoline that funnels in from a stable of lawnmowers in the attached garage.

Ah, must be the black potbelly stove in the middle of the room.

"My father thought it was a good luck charm," Siciliano, 49, said. "It wasn't my good luck charm. It was his."

Siciliano, with sandy-blond hair that falls just below her shoulders and a deep tan that suggests she doesn't spend much time indoors, is quick to warn that her father's relic is nearing the end of the line.

So, too, is her time at the office wedged between Count Basie Fields and the North Jersey Coast Line railroad tracks, as she plans a move from Park to to [247 Bridge Avenue](#) this summer.

This is a busy time of year for [Siciliano Landscape Company](#), and aside from a brisk business, there's cause for celebration.

More notable for Siciliano, though, is that the business, started by her grandfather, Paul, is in its 75th year tending to lawns and gardens across Monmouth and Ocean counties.

"There's a lot to be excited about," Siciliano said.

To the best of her knowledge, Siciliano is the only female owner of a landscaping company in the region, but she pooh-poohs that as a storyline. The success or failure of her company is all on her shoulders, she explains, and can't let herself or others get caught up in superfluous details.

"Labels are sometimes best left in the closet," she said. "Once you start labeling, you look at the

person, not the product.”

A former Wall Street bond broker, Siciliano came into landscaping late in life, although she was raised with her entire family working and learning the business. In the spring of 2001, she was starting to give thought to leaving the city, returning home and switching careers to work for her father, also named Paul. Then September 11 happened, hastening her decision.

“I lost friends. I didn’t want to go back,” she said. “I was turning 40. I thought there was a second career in me. The idea of coming home and doing something new was very appealing to me.”

So she did, and as a partner with her father, she applied her business experience back to expand the landscaping company beyond its stock in trade of maintenance to include installation and design. She was busy then, sure, but is now busy as ever since taking the reins from her dad to become the face of Siciliano Landscape.

Her day begins somewhere between 7 and 8a, when she sits down at her desk to formulate a daily game plan, which she’ll then relay to her “crew chiefs” during a morning meeting. Most mornings she’ll spend consumed with administrative duties, like paperwork.

At some point, she’ll meet with prospective clients and return missed phone calls. Later, she transforms from administrator to inspector, and visits the day’s project sites to make sure everything is in order. It’s not that she mistrusts her employees — she, in fact, raves about them — it’s that there’s a lot on the line if something isn’t done precisely the way her client wants it.

“It’s not like you go to the car wash. I send a group of men (and women) to your home. There’s an intimacy there,” Siciliano said.

She bears that trust with a great sense of pride, but also with the awareness of her responsibility. To make it all work, she looks beyond the notion of a charm delivering success.

Instead, she defers to a wall in her office, where a picture of [Andy Warhol](#) and a quote attributed to him hang: “To be good in business is the most fascinating kind of art.”

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