



Abramo Dispirito is the tailor at Dino's Alterations in New Rochelle. CARUCHA L. MEUSE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Meet local companies that go above and beyond

The Stove Lady

Carlita Belgrove first began helping her dad run his Mount Vernon appliance business when she was 12, doing inventory, training new secretaries and setting up accounting systems. By the time she was 14, she could run the whole business and manage his seven employees when he was out of the country on vacation.

And then after graduating from Iona College with an accounting degree, she took off for a very successful career in corporate America, working as a saleswoman, auditor, analyst and finance and pension manager for JP Morgan Chase, GE Capital Commercial Finance and Goya Foods.

When she was 29, her father died suddenly and she was left with a choice — try to run and resuscitate his failing appliance business or continue with her good jobs in financial management. For four years she did both, running and reinventing the appliance company in her own name and brand at night and on weekends.

She also figured out that if she was going to go anywhere with an appliance business she needed to know how to fix them. So she took classes to learn how to repair stoves, washers, dryers, refrigerators, air conditioners and dishwashers.

She also read books and manuals and mentored with other appliance companies.

"I taught myself most of what I know," she says.

In 2004, she decided to make the break and devote herself full time to her own business, Belgrove Appliance Inc. Her father had specialized in Crown stoves and she found herself drawn to fixing old stoves, too.

Before long, customers started calling her "the stove lady" and the name stuck.

She does most of her work in the clients' home, or back in her Mount Vernon shop for more extensive repair and restoration jobs.

"It's a male-dominated field," she says. "I don't know any other women in this field. I don't know any other women who fix appliances."

"Women love it when I come in their house," she adds. "We speak the same language."

Her customers are all over the tri-state area. "I literally cover New York, New Jersey and Connecticut," she says, sometimes

all in the same day.

"Even though I have three employees, I do all of the repairs in the field and all of the consultation visits," Belgrove says.

"Yes, I do have rich clients on Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue, but most of my clients are not rich," she says. "They're working people who want to keep their stoves rather than have to buy a new one. They may have paid a lot of money for them."

"People think this is a dying business, but it is a growing art form," Belgrove says. "Keeping these old things alive keeps people grounded to their past."

"I was very close to my grandparents and I like the idea that I can keep a piece of history going," she adds.

Most of the stoves she repairs, restores and cleans were made in the 1940s and '50s, and she also specializes in six-burner Crown stoves made from the 1960s to 1987. Her favorite old stove is the Chambers Model BZ.

"The stoves are reliable and they give people a sense of security, convenience, and reliability you can't find with new appliances," Belgrove says.

"I'm a people person and what I love about this business is all the people I get to meet," she adds. "It's more than just the stoves."

Belgrove prides herself on customer service. She is A-plus rated and an honor roll member of Angie's List and A-plus rated with the Better Business Bureau. She particularly loves to fix stoves that other companies say are beyond repair. In recent months, Belgrove has been helping many victims of Superstorm Sandy by restoring their stoves for thousands less than they would normally cost.

"I like to build a relationship with my clients," she says. "Even after their stoves are fixed, we stay in touch. I love what I do, I love my clients — I would never go back to corporate America."

She gets 90 percent of her business through her website. She does have a workshop, a small showroom and warehouse space in Mount Vernon, but she recently suffered major water damage and she doesn't have the staff yet to run it as a drop-in anytime public showroom.

Find her: Belgrove Appliance Inc./The Stove Lady, Carlita Belgrove, 914-664-5231, www.stovelady.com

— Bill Cary

The Organizer

Chaos is a world in which Lynn Milstein thrives. One morning, she was waving goodbye to a family she helped down-



Rob Young, the owner of Price-Less Painting, says success is all in the attitude. CARUCHA L. MEUSE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

size before a move. "We were just putting on the final touches," she says. "At this point, people basically want to get rid of everything."

Milstein can help straighten out homes and then stage them for potential buyers. She's also a whiz at clearing out estates. "I go through every room, and check every nook and crevice. On the very top shelf of a bathroom linen closet once, I found someone's grandmother's silver." She found \$600 in the bottom of a coat bag in the basement.

"If it weren't for Lynn, my house would not have been on the market," says West Nyack homeowner Cathy Monaco. "The process of getting it ready to be shown, and preparing to move after 20-plus years terrified me and I didn't know where to start. Lynn set me straight with a process for every room. She also ran an incredibly smooth estate sale for me. I'd strongly recommend her for her ability to make sense out of chaos."

Once it's all out in the open, Milstein says it's up to the family to decide what to keep, but she makes it easier. "I will take out all the utensils in a drawer and group them together, all the spatulas, all the knives, all the soup ladles, and when they see all of that, they realize, how many spatulas do you really need?"

Milstein has lots of partners that do everything from recycle to resell things of value. "I know what to throw away, what has value, what to donate and where. Sometimes people feel better when they know that things are being donated locally."

For an estate, it takes 80 hours of work she says, and her fee is by the hour. If family members are helping, it's more like 30 hours.

Find her: Lynn Milstein, iOrganizeNY, Ossining, 914-588-6167

— Karen Croke

The Tailor

If it seems incongruous to go to a tailor for

your home improvement needs, you haven't worked with Abramo Dispirito of Dino's Alterations. "Abramo is the best tailor around," says Scarsdale's Lyn Peterson, an interior designer and Living Here columnist. If you've been in New Rochelle for a while, chances are you have had a pair of pants cuffed or a skirt hemmed by Dispirito, who has been in business on Eastchester Road since 1969.

Time marches on, but it's frozen in his shop, where the tools of the trade haven't changed much over the years: needle, thread, ancient sewing machine, and iron.

The beautiful thing about Dino's is that, for creative entertainers, he does fabulous things with fabric. "I use him for home items as well," Peterson says. "He hems my curtains, makes me pillow cases and table cloths. At first he was reluctant, but I told him a hem was a hem!"

Find him: Dino's Alterations: 6 Eastchester Road, New Rochelle, 914-633-8623

— Karen Croke

The Painter

Painters, as we all know, are a dime a dozen. Anyone with a ladder can start a business, but that doesn't mean they've got talent. Rob Young, on the other hand? "He's fantastic," says Cathy Monaco of Young, who owns and has run West Nyack's Price-Less Painting since 1985.

"They have been my go-to painters for 20 years," Monaco says of Price-Less Painting. "Rob Young is so easy to work with and his crew have been with him for a very long time. He endeared himself to me when he actually took the time to repaint my dining room ceiling three times (and brought in the Benjamin Moore guy for a consult!) until he was satisfied. There was one tiny little crack that kept appearing. Use him once, you will use him again."

Young is much more modest about his skills. "I have great customers," he

says.

Young started his company after working as a carpenter and hearing his bosses gripe that, if they had to do it all again, they would go into the painting business. "They were worried about wiping out their profit if they made one mistake," Young says. "On the other hand, if you make a mistake in painting, it's just 5 gallons more paint you need to buy."

His success is all based on attitude, he says. "You just follow through, no matter the job. We painted the body of a house before Superstorm Sandy and the trim was all wrapped in aluminum siding so it wasn't painted," Young says. After the hurricane, some of the trim blew off and the homeowner, an older retired gentleman, called to say something happened to his paint job. "Well, what happened was the aluminum trim blew off," Young says, "so we looked around, found it in the buses, and put it back up for him."

"You just have to do the right thing — in life in general — and when you do, it pays off." As Cathy Monaco says, when you find a good painter, you never let them go.

Find him: Price-Less Painting, 845-624-1800.

— Karen Croke

Stained Glass Kings

Peter Rohlf and his two sons, Hans and Greg, run Mount Vernon's Rohlf's Stained Glass Studio, which juggles projects for large churches with individual homeowners who may have a single broken pane of glass.

Rockland's Leslie and Jim Brunn used them for stained glass panels in the restoration they did on an old Suffern barn. Rohlf's does lots of leaded-glass restoration and replacement work in the thousands of old Tudors that define many of the suburbs that ring New York.

About three-quarters of the company's business is dedicated to restoration work, with the remaining quarter going to making new stained-glass pieces for homeowners and other clients.

MORE EXPERTS:

In the Living Here pages each week, we feature home renovations and include recommendations from the homeowners — professionals they have personally worked with that they would recommend to others. Here are some of those recommendations:

Grand staircase at Bear Tracks: When Jim and Leslie Brunn restored Bear Tracks, a Suffern barn-turned-recording studio, Leslie found a single spindle from a long-ago staircase in a closet and brought it to United Rockland Stairs. "They replicated the entire thing from the one spindle," Brunn says. (United Rockland Stairs, Inc. 9 N. Airmont Road, Suffern, 845-357-1900; www.unitedrocklandstairs.com.)

Mark and Jennifer Picucci's custom-made kitchen and bar cabinets: "These were all custom made by Silva Cabinetry. They were good for the job because they have the ability to customize anything in any size," says Mark Picucci. "The kitchen table was done by them, too, to match the island in the kitchen." (12 White St., Buchanan, 914-737-7697, www.silvacabinetry.net)

Liz & Marty Wortendyke's custom upholstery was done by S. Tillim & Co., a 55-year-old family owned firm. "Mrs. Tillim and her family did our drapery and upholstery," Liz says. "Wonderful work. Very fair prices." West Nyack, 845-358-7207, www.stillimny.com.

The third-generation company dates to 1920, when Peter's father, Hans H. Rohlf, bought the stained glass firm of Emil Teitz. Peter took over, with lots of help from his mother, at age 17 when his father died suddenly. They were living in Tuckahoe at the time. Now 72, Peter still comes to work every day.

Officially, Peter, who now lives with his wife in Eastchester, is the CEO of Rohlf's. Hans, who lives in Rye Brook, is the president and Greg, a resident of White Plains, is vice president.

"My brother and I go out and do all the sales calls," Hans explains. "Dad picks and chooses what he does," including running the shop area in the 13,000-square-foot building and the all-important glass selection table. "He just loves glass."

Find them: Rohlf's Stained Glass Studio, 783 S. Third Ave., Mount Vernon, 800-969-4106, www.rohlfstudio.com