

suburban life

Karen Thompson, the founder of **LSL Brands** and the creator of some of the area's most recognizable names in retail and hospitality, provides a personalized experience guests remember.

page 64



+ Also Inside:
Top Realtors,
Superwomen,
and more



“People are surprised by the number of professional staff involved in LSL Brands. I certainly don’t do this alone.”

—Karen Thompson, LSL Brands

Karen Thompson (second from right) with members of her team at Fox & Holly in Peddler’s Village



always in fashion

Karen Thompson, the founder of LSL Brands and the creator of some of the area’s most recognizable names in retail and hospitality, provides a personalized experience guests remember.

by **LINDSEY GETZ** photography by **GABRIELA BARRANTES**

Karen Thompson remembers being at a truly pivotal moment in her life when she received sage advice from someone dear to her: her grandmother.

At the time, Thompson had just graduated from high school and did not consider college the way forward. Her grandmother suggested Thompson carve her own path in a field she loved: fashion. This exchange served as the figurative “lightbulb moment” that would fuel Thompson’s evolution into one of the area’s most successful entrepreneurs.

Today, Thompson guides LSL Brands, an

innovative retail and hospitality company that has seen tremendous success in its 33 years. With 10 store locations in Peddler’s Village and across the Delaware River at Palmer Square in Princeton and Washington Street Mall in Cape May, shoppers likely know Thompson better for the brands she has breathed into life—namely, Lace Silhouettes Lingerie, Cotton Company, and Fox & Holly, all of which aspire to provide a personalized and fulfilling shopping experience.

Thompson got her start at the department store chain Bamberger’s at just 17 years old.

Following her grandmother’s advice, she worked her way up through the buying system and eventually transitioned to the wholesale side. Although she was spending a great deal of time in New York City, she began noticing a void in Bucks County’s retail community—a void that she would fill with her first brand, Lace Silhouettes Lingerie.

One might even say Lace Silhouettes has “changed the game” for women, many of whom have never received a proper bra fitting. To this day, women find the shopping experience at Lace Silhouettes unlike any other. After scheduling a one-hour complimentary bra fitting, many women say it’s the first time in their life they have found comfort and fit in a bra. Of course, Lace Silhouettes is as well known for its collections of cozy pajamas, robes, and other sleepwear as it is for its bra fittings. Today, Lace Silhouettes in Peddler’s Village remains the flagship store, with additional locations in Princeton and Cape May.

These types of experiences, which simply cannot be duplicated online, have kept shoppers returning to Thompson’s brick-and-mortar stores for years. Thompson says a visit to one of her stores becomes an “outing,” and shoppers love to make a day of it.

“Over the years, people have really come to know us, and we are connecting with guests on a very personal level,” she adds.



“When it comes to remaining current, we believe in talking to today’s young people who are tomorrow’s shoppers.”

Students learn invaluable skills including merchandising, product marketing, and day-to-day operations. They also learn to interact and

her success. Dave, her husband, is the company’s problem solver and “jack of all trades.” He formerly owned a technology company, and those skills helped him tackle various challenges as they arise. Likewise, Thompson’s son Kerry handles the stores’ visuals. Having gone to the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, he brings a keen eye for design when it comes to merchandising and purchasing. Her other son, Colin, went to school

for marketing and has been a sounding board for marketing-related decisions. His full-time job, however, is playing tight end for the NFL’s Carolina Panthers.

“I am proud to have made this a family business,” Thompson says. “I couldn’t have gotten to where I am today without them.”



“We have always treated each shopper that comes through our doors as a guest in our home.”

As retail has become increasingly impersonal, shoppers crave the kinds of intimate experiences provided by the establishments under LSL Brands. Thompson credits one of her “key ingredients to success,” her staff. Bucking the trend of high turnover rates known in retail, Thompson has been blessed with a consistent team, many of whom have worked for her for several years. She says she is incredibly proud of the staff’s professionalism and commitment to service. Shoppers get to know the staff, and vice versa.

“We have had some of the same shoppers coming to us for generations—perhaps first coming in with their parents and now shopping for themselves or for their own family,” Thompson says. “It’s just a really special experience. We really get to know them as family.”

In addition to building decades-long relationships with shoppers, Thompson gives back to the next generation through an annual internship program that accommodates anywhere from eight to 15 students. She enjoys helping current students who, like her former self, are looking for their start in fashion and retail.

“We love this internship program because we end up learning as much from the students as they learn from us,” Thompson shares.



make one-on-one connections with shoppers, something of a lost art these days. The year typically ends with a buying project in which students experience a buying trip to Manhattan. Over the years, the internship program has included student participants from across the country.

“I think there’s always this preconceived notion that you have to go to New York City to succeed in fashion, but there are amazing opportunities right here in Bucks County,” Thompson says. “I often find that people are surprised by the number of professional staff involved in LSL Brands. I certainly don’t do this alone.”

Along with her staff, Thompson says her family’s support has been instrumental to

Of course, she also credits her grandmother, the woman who helped Thompson forge her path as a highly successful entrepreneur. Now 102 years old, her grandmother has watched Thompson’s steady ascent with pride. Not only has she seen Thompson transform her love of fashion into a fulfilling career, but she has also seen her granddaughter influence the lives of others, from staff and students to the many guests her brands have served, from one generation to the next. ■

→ Visit www.lslbrands.com for information on LSL Brands’ store locations, hours of operation, and more.