

# suburban life



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# Celebrating 35 Years of Passion, Panties, and Perseverance

by LEIGH STUART | photos by ALISON DUNLAP



From a single intimate-apparel shop in Peddler's Village, Karen Thompson has shaped **Lace Silhouettes Lingerie** into a small but growing empire and a leading name in East Coast fashion.

**LSL** Brands started 35 years ago as one woman's dream: to bring intimate apparel in Bucks County to the next level. Now, after decades of ups and downs, storms and sunny days, what started as Lace Silhouettes Lingerie has evolved into a family of stores collectively known as LSL Brands, a label that includes not only women's lingerie and sleepwear but also some of the top women's and men's fashions in the industry, and much more.

Karen Thompson, the founder behind this still-growing empire, traces her roots in retail back to her youth when she worked for well-known names such as Bamberger's department store.

"My first job was at a drugstore in a local mall in Quakertown," Thompson shares. "I worked there through high school as a cashier. When I graduated high school, I

knew I had a passion for fashion and took a job at Bamberger's—now Macy's—in the Montgomery Mall. I started as a manager of the handbag department and then moved into buying."

It had long been Thompson's dream to have her own women's clothing store when fate opened the door. She was working in a high-profile wholesale position in New York City when she capitalized on an opportunity to open her first store.

"Opening an intimate-apparel store was actually completely by chance," she says. "I was looking for opportunities and my father-in-law suggested a bridal salon with multiple store extensions in Fountainville, Pennsylvania. It was known as 'one-stop-shopping for the bride.' There was a lease opening for the intimate apparel store and I took it."

As time went on, Thompson knew she

wanted to grow and was focused on attracting more customers. She decided to move her store to Peddler's Village, the shopping, dining and entertainment destination in Lahaska.

"It wasn't always easy," Thompson shares. "When I had my store with the bridal salon, and even when I moved it to Peddler's Village, I was still working full time for a wholesale company in New York City. I commuted to that job during the week and managed Lace Silhouettes Lingerie on the weekends."

Her flagship store still remains in Peddler's Village, but her store count has multiplied to nine across Peddler's Village and Princeton and Cape May, New Jersey ... with more to follow. With the opening of every new location, her motivation has remained the same—to provide a welcoming, boutique experience to every guest who walks through her doors.

"We're a people company," Thompson



*You really get to know the guests well when they come in. Our mantra is 'one guest at a time.'* —Karen Thompson, LSL Brands

says of LSL Brands. “I like people, and I like hearing people’s stories. We’re retail therapist in a way. You really get to know the guests well when they come in. Our mantra is ‘one guest at a time.’”

In her shops, as in life, Thompson works to make every detail of her guests’ shopping experience above and beyond the ordinary.

“It’s simple little things, like offering complimentary refreshments,” she says. “We also wrap gifts for the holiday season. I think that’s why men like to shop with us,” she adds with a laugh. “I think it’s our attention to detail. We’re more than retail. We’re also in the hospitality business. I have a dream of someday expanding our hospitality expertise into the hotel and lodging industry, too.”

Thompson strives to ensure each of her businesses is an integral part in the community.

“When there are events in the town, we want to make sure we support those and show that we are a part of that town and support a lot of charities in those towns,” she says. “We are very philanthropic. My team and I are very passionate about giving back to the local community and are always looking for ways to grow our philanthropic endeavors.”

Thompson attributes her success to several factors, though she puts her superior team at the top of the list.

“I have a lot of great people who work for the company and who help me coordinate at all the different levels it takes to run a brick-and-mortar these days,” she says. “I have such an amazing team that continues

to learn and grow with me. I am lucky to have so many dedicated and professional staff members.”

Thompson has had a lot of professional mentors along the way, too.

“I learned a lot from Earl Jamison, the founder of Peddler’s Village,” she shares. “He always kept an interest in my growth. At the time, I didn’t realize how much I really learned from him. He would always ask me open-ended questions, and guided me to the answers that ultimately helped me reach the next step.”

Her family provides integral support as well.

“My mother and father always supported me and demonstrated how to run a family business,” she says. “My grandmother was also a great role model. She saw my love for fashion at a young age and even suggested I get into the buying field as a career after high school.

“You do really have to have the support of family when you have a family business,” she continues. “My husband is still responsible for ‘everything tech’ for the company and a lot of business matters. I have two grown sons now, one of who is directly a part of the company’s visual direction and merchandising. My other son is not full time but consults me.”

As for the future, Thompson has one word on her mind: growth. In fact, as she considers opening more stores in the future, she has her sights set even farther afield than the Philadelphia and Jersey Shore areas.



“We have our sights on Delaware and Maryland and, hopefully, Florida,” she says. “We make sure towns are fully engaged before we open and that we can have an experienced and professional staff. We usually start with an intimate apparel or clothing store, then build others around that. Usually, we’ll end up with two or three businesses in a town. We’ll be expanding slowly and steadily, one town at a time.

“During the pandemic my team and I were able to work on our craft,” she continues. “We became stronger by remaining still. I think that’s important. You can always turn a negative into a positive. Now that we are moving past the pandemic, we are ready to grow.”

For Thompson, this is just the beginning.

“I want this company to reach 100 years and beyond. I won’t be here, but the stores and the journey will be.” ■



For more information on Lace Silhouettes Lingerie and LSL Brands’ family of stores, including its history and locations, visit [lslbrands.com](https://www.lslbrands.com) or call (215) 794-2948.