

She runs her eatery using past job skills



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Lillian Dent of Roosevelt has the proud distinction of running one of the few full-service southern cuisine restaurants on Long Island with her daughter, Leisa. The eatery, LL Dent — one L for Lillian, one L for Leisa — in Carle Place opened five years ago and has become a favorite for some Long Islanders — with diners coming from as far as Port Jefferson. Dent, 70, started the venture in 2004 after more than 30 years of working for Dow Jones' sales department, including 10 years in upper management. Nowadays, Dent divides her time between running the restaurant, volunteering in the community and traveling the world — and she is “having a ball.”

You had not worked in the restaurant industry before, how did you start out?

“I contacted the Small Business Development Center at Farmingdale. I took a number of classes and workshops there related to opening a new business. I got a counselor who worked with me on the business plan. They didn't do it for you, but pointed you in the right direction. It took me about seven months to complete the business plan, and after that we started looking for a location.”

What skills from your previous job did you bring to your new business, and what skills did you have to learn?

“From my previous jobs — just managing people and financing because I was responsible for budgeting 350 people in my department. So I think the management side was part of it from my previous experience. And did I learn anything new? A lot — especially that every day is a new day in the restaurant business. There's no two days that are the same.”

How did your business weather the recession?

“We have a website and we use a PR firm that I hired prior to opening. My daughter creates these weekly specials and we blast email them — which have helped somewhat because sometimes people will see a certain item that they're looking for and they'll come in. There have been times when I have had to go to my personal money to help pay bills and stay open. The business has



Lillian Dent, co-owner of LL Dent, runs the southern cuisine restaurant in Carle Place with her daughter, Leisa.

PHOTO BY CHARLES ECKERT

CORPORATE snapshot

NAME: Lillian Dent

COMPANY: LL Dent

TITLE: Co-owner

BUSINESS: Full-service restaurant

LOCATION: Carle Place

REVENUE: \$500,000 a year

EMPLOYEES: 13

gone down from when we first opened. Now, it's maintaining status quo. Not a full recovery, but we're holding out.”

How would you describe your leadership style?

“I look at it more as motivating an individual. I think everybody wants to feel important and a part of something. That was my management style when I worked at Dow Jones. I think if you talk to an individual and get them to feel like they are part of the motivation, then they are motivated to do a good job.”

What advice do you have for people who want to go into the restaurant business?

“First I would tell them to work in a restaurant and understand it from the bottom up. And then decide if that's really what you want to do. You have to have a passion for it. For me, I've always worked closely with individuals. I'm a people person — that's why I'm front of the house and my daughter runs the back of the house.”