

## Making it work

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Take a room full of 10 women, each of whom have children under the age of 18. Now, place that room anywhere in metropolitan Buffalo. How many of the women are employed?

Seven. The percentage of mothers in metropolitan Buffalo who have children younger than 18 and who are working is 70.7 percent, the second highest in the nation, according to U.S. Census data. Minneapolis - with 73 percent - topped the list for working moms in metro areas with populations of more than 1 million. The analysis, conducted this year by Creative Class Group, a Washington think tank, mirrors a decade-long trend that finds more moms juggling career and family. "During the last 10 years, there's been a paradigmatic shift socially and professionally," said Melinda Rath Sanderson, executive director and founder of the Women's Business Research. In fact, women-owned businesses have grown twice as fast as all others.

How do women balance family, career and also squirrel away some time for themselves? We asked three local "executive moms" - a landscape architect, a vintage apparel merchant and a job placement guru - to share their formulas for success. As you will see, determination and commitment are only a part of the equation.

### Making it all happen

Each morning, whether Danielle Loukataris starts at her Elmwood Avenue boutique or in her home in the Village of Kenmore, the 41-year-old mother prioritizes. Her goal? To make as much "happen" as possible.

"What has to be done? Who has to be where?" she said. "To be a hockey mom on top of running the business is almost like pulling your hair out."

When Loukataris launched her vintage clothing business online in 2001, she would plant daughter Sadie - a toddler at the time - on her lap as they both sat before the computer. Today, the mother of two - Sadie, now 7, and Alex, 10 - runs a flourishing shop called "Divine Finds." Her business has gone international, with booths at trade shows in Toronto and London. Come 2008, you will see "Divine Finds" apparel in the movie "Revolutionary Road," filming now in New York City and starring Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio.

"It's in my blood," Loukataris said of her business. "I do a lot of work at night after the kids go to bed. This is my life. I love what I do. I'm happy. My kids are happy and that is all that matters. If anything, I'm teaching them a sense of the real world.

"I want to be home a minimum of three days a week, have dinner with them, get them to bed at night," Loukataris added. "Though sometimes we're eating ramen noodles at 8 p.m."

While Sadie and Alex appear comfortable in the shop - Sadie tries her best at window displays while Alex sweeps - there are times they beg their mom to leave them at home.

"Once in a while I'll get a tantrum. 'Can't I just stay and play with my friends?' " Loukataris said. "I have apologized a lot. They know Mom's busy. At the store, we have a sign that says: 'Sorry for the inconvenience. The boutique needed to close early today.' When you see that sign, I probably had to go pick up my kids."

The budget that guides their household is strict, explained Loukataris, who is divorced. The children have learned not to ask for money that much, but one recent day, Alex did ask for permission to care for lawns on the street to earn money.

"He wanted a remote-control car at Radio Shack," his mother recalled. "Why don't you go out and do side jobs?" she suggested. "Ten customers at \$10 will make you \$100."

The next day, Alex returned after an afternoon of lawn care. "He had \$7," Loukataris said. "He subcontracted one of his friends and gave him \$3. I'm teaching them to be little entrepreneurs."

## Mom needs 'time out'

Mothers who run their own businesses say guilt issues surface when you least expect them. For landscape architect Joy Kuebler, it was house cleaning.

"The house had to have some kind of control," said Kuebler, 34. "I had to give in. I was not able to clean up the house for my kids. With terrible guilt, I hired a housekeeper. Once I got used to the fact that someone would clean up on Tuesdays, it was a huge relief."

While working out of your home may be convenient, it can also bring on a raging case of cabin fever, which is why Scott Kuebler (Joy's husband and also an architect) knocked down the garage and replaced it with a freestanding office building, a 25-foot walk from the family's house.

"I got stir crazy looking at the same kitchen mess for three days," Joy Kuebler said. "There are no breaks. On one hand, you never leave the house, but you never leave the office either. Now I'm still home, but I leave during the day for another building."

The business - Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect - started in 2003, six years after Kuebler graduated from Cornell University and two years after the birth of her son, Wyatt.

"I worked for a year and had my second," Kuebler said. "That's the way we started - just me and the little guy. I sent him to day-care for most of the first year. You can't answer a phone with a two-year-old. After Maren was born, I started three-day work weeks."

The first year the business had five jobs. Already this year, Kuebler has opened 25 projects. Along the way, she hired two architects and an office assistant, all of whom help in a pinch

with the children. Like other working moms, Kuebler fills in the gaps late at night.

"I try not to do weekends because that's taking away from the kids," she said. "At night I do production work: writing out specs, completing bid documents, things that crank the job out the door. There were times I woke up Sunday morning and would not go to bed till Monday night."

A pint-sized work station in the office encourages Wyatt, 5, and Maren, 3, to pretend they are landscape architects for a day, sitting on the floor next to mom. But the ultimate key to balancing success is an ability to take a time-out day when needed.

"I know the project will get done, but at this moment in time I am taking a break," Joy Kuebler said. "I have the ability to say, 'We're going to the zoo today, kids.' "

## Support system is key

Nicole Fiorella learned the value of a support network early on in juggling family and her job search firm called Briand Fiorella Search, specializing in the recruitment of medical, pharmaceutical and biotech executives. Her husband, Daniel Fiorella, gets 7-year-old daughter Katie off the bus after school. He also puts the meals on the table during the week - and grocery shops, too.

"I really believe you need a plan and support system," said Fiorella, 34. "My plan this summer was to put her in summer camp for five weeks. The other time she will be with her grandparents or cousins.

"When you take the risk of owning your own business, there are some perks that come with it. If my husband's working overtime, Katie can come to the office with me," Fiorella added. "I have a room that she can do her homework in. I have that flexibility."

She also has a to-do list, one that guides her through each day and contains the top six most important things to do. That list, chances are, will not contain "me-time" for mom.

"A friend of mine takes a day for herself each month," said Fiorella. "I'm working toward doing that, whether it's on the weekend or during the week. I also plan on starting yoga and I will be taking ice-skating lessons.

"I felt guilty when Katie was small and she went to daycare at five months," Fiorella admitted. "I've been working full-time since then, and I don't feel guilty now. Your children have their own life during the day. They socialize with their friends. They have their own scheduled activities. We spend quality time together in the evening. She ice skates year round. I'm there with her for all the extra-curricular activities. I don't have a nanny. It's me and my husband."