

A team that's successful in any language



DAVE NEWHOUSE
Good Neighbors

CARLA ITZKOWICH needed a business partner in her international marketing company. So she recruited her mother, Norma Armon, who has a doctorate in linguistics, which Carla's business is all about.



But Mom agreed to partner up on one condition: Daughter runs the show.

"One of the proudest decisions I've made in my life," Norma said, "was that when we formally decided how the business would be operated, Carla would have the final say."



Thereby avoiding a mother/daughter conflict.

"Because being the person that I am," Norma said, "I'd never let her make the final decision. Every time I do a mom on her, she reminds me, 'Hey, I'm the boss.'"

Thus Carla is company president and Norma chairman of the board. Their company, International Contact, of Oakland, markets to its clients in 100 different languages in just about any country that places business above politics.

For instance. Myanmar is out, Ethiopia is in. So is any country speaking Hmong.

Overall, this mother/daughter thing seems to be working out.

"She's extremely tenacious," Norma said. "She's dogged."

"Norma's so experienced," Carla said. "And she's a great worker."

But, quite frankly, Mom came aboard "because (Carla) needed the money," said Norma, not one to mince words. "For six months, I supported the business."

Norma was running I Contact in Los Angeles, while Carla was running I Contact in Oakland, when they decided in 1981 to make it one company in Oakland. The company then became incorporated in 1982.

There's an even stronger family feel to the firm as Carla's husband, Jon Golding, is in charge of desktop publishing. He works from home in order to prevent potential family feuds. And Norma also works at home.

This leaves Carla in charge at the office in downtown Oakland. The company markets to such clients as Apple, Bank of America, Chevron, Citicorp, Microsoft and Sprint. That's half the company's business; the other half is public service.

International Contact Inc. flourished under Carla's and Norma's direction until the recession hit the firm hard this year.

But a bigger scare occurred a year ago.

Carla, then 48, was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Suddenly, Norma, then 72, was put in that vulnerable position a parent dreads: The thought of outliving your child.

Only Norma didn't flinch.

"I knew she would beat it," she said.

Norma knows her daughter. And Carla grew confident after discovering that breast cancer "is the most curable form of cancer."

There is relief now within the family. Carla's cancer is in remission, though she's presently leaning on a cane after breaking a hip skiing at Vail, Utah.

Golding, 53, met Carla after he left the restaurant business and took a

temporary office manager's job at International Contact Inc. Carla kept him on, they began dating after six months, and they've been married 20 years. "It can be a challenge," he said of being employed by his wife and his mother-in-law. "After the fifth year, it started to get tense, and it was decided that I should take my business out of the building. You know, the Latin temper."

Golding laughed as he said it; both his wife and mother in law were born in Mexico.



Norma Armon, center, and her daughter, Carla Itzkowich, and son in law, Jon Golding, stand with their staff Thursday in Oakland at International Contact, a firm that assists clients in dealing with the proliferation of Spanish language markets in the U.S.

"But we became the kind of people that, if we had an issue, then let's talk about it right now," he said. "Everything gets dealt with pretty quickly and out in the open. We don't hold onto grudges, and we move on."

By working at home, he does the cooking. Both his and Carla's diets became healthier — goodbye red meat and dairy products — after her cancer.

"There's no reason why it has to kill you," she said with that same dogged spirit. "Uplifting stories are important."

Speaking of uplifting, Carla has received the 2011 Leadership Recognition Award from the United States Leaders and Entrepreneurs' Association.

Couldn't have done it without Mom.