

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Bringing together two lives — and two businesses

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON

**DENISE CARDONA** leans in, giving her full attention to conversations. Her eyes flash big, with a mix of intensity and mirth. She never interrupts. When it's her turn, she talks as much with her hands as she does her mouth. She says her style of engagement may come from her Italian heritage — third-generation Monterey, she's proud to add.

Maybe it's just who she is, a dynamic that surely helped her land her first job, right out of high school, which she's built into quite a career.

### Mutual interests

In 1985, an 18-year-old Cardona she walked into ColorAd Printers on a Friday the 13th, hoping to fill a receptionist vacancy in the company. It was her lucky day. Or maybe theirs.

"I don't know whether my boss, Andre Nizet, saw something in me or just believed in giving a kid a chance," Cardona said, "but he taught me all aspects of the print business. He was a very good businessman, so I learned a lot about running a business based on customer service."

Nizet taught Cardona about accountability, reminding her that the employer doesn't pay the wages — the customers do. Before long, she was running the shop.

Cardona met her husband, Kevin Cardona, at Sharky's Bar in Monterey, now defunct. But the relationship has flourished, ignited by a mutual interest in the printing business — and each other. While she worked for ColorAd,

he served as general manager for Printworx in Salinas. They were married nearly 27 years ago — imagine the quality of those invitations — and in 1998, they had their daughter, Claire.

Cardona remembered, "After I had my daughter and came back to work in 1999, Andre said I knew the business well enough that he was promoting me to sales. This gave me the opportunity to work with customers on a whole other level."

One year later, Printworx purchased ColorAd. Nizet returned to his native France and Cardona's husband became her boss.

"Because of my experience in the business, coupled with sales, I brought my clients with me. I was part of the deal," Cardona said.

### Like a symphony

Four years ago, the owner of Printworx became ill and made plans to close the operation. The Cardonas combined Kevin's business and management expertise with Denise's operations and sales experience and reopened the company as Printworks Solutions.

"The transition was a little scary at first, but we both have a strong production background and a shared vision, so we work well together. Kevin handles the business side, and I handle the creative side," she said.

Cardona likened herself to a symphony conductor, orchestrating different aspects of the company — preparing estimates, brainstorming marketing plans, collaborating on designs, editing proofs, meeting with clients — and managing their projects.

When not on the job, Cardona is always thinking about her clients, but she pursues other passions — among them, baking Italian cookies, cannoli, and Aunt Grace's homemade pizza — balanced by high-intensity exercise, balanced by hours of quiet reading.

"I use reading to quiet the chatter of my day, to unwind," she said. "When it's a really good writer, I appreciate the web they weave and how it draws me



Denise Cardona owns Printworx Solutions with her husband, Kevin. Her first employer said she had "ink in her blood."

*We both have a strong production background and a shared vision*

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in. I sit there, with my dog nearby, and I keep interrupting my husband to share a particularly well-crafted sentence. I guess I want to take him with me into the story."

Cardona thinks back to that first day at ColorAd, when

she walked in off the street to secure a receptionist position, and lets her mind marvel through 37 years of building her business and her own story, most of which includes her husband.

"While my friends were in college, I was learning my trade," she said. "Andre Nizet told me, you either have the

ink in your veins or you don't. I clearly do, but I never forget that he gave me the opportunity to figure that out, training me the 'Andre way' of employing a strong work ethic, business ethics, and accountability, to help me develop it into a career."

It turned out to be a lesson worth remembering.