

DONNA CARPENTER

By now, everyone knows the legendary Burton Snowboards started in Jake Carpenter's Londonderry barn in 1977. Donna Gaston met Jake in 1981 after he moved the business to his home in Manchester. "On our 'date' weekends, we'd put on hazmat suits and dip the wood-core boards Jake had made that week into polyurethane. Nasty stuff. We've come a long way since then." Burton now ranks among the top echelon in environmental sustainability, driving the snow sports industry forward. Donna Carpenter, CEO of Burton, and her husband, Jake, founder and chairman, married in 1983. The couple reside in Stowe and have three sons, 26, 22 and 19. And yes, they still snowboard as a family.

Edible Green Mountains: You could move Burton to anywhere in the world. Why remain in Vermont?

Donna Carpenter: Vermont's more than a place; it's a spirit of community. That's a value all Vermonters share. By staying here, we bring a little Vermont to the rest of the world.

EGM: Were you an athlete growing up?

DC: No, I really wasn't. I loved riding horses and my instructor got me interested in fencing. I was competitive but not naturally athletic. I always had to work harder than anyone else. I still do! But I did fence at the collegiate level when I was at Columbia.

EGM: What's your exercise schedule?

DC: I learned long ago that if I don't take care of myself, I'm useless to others. Jake has been seriously ill twice in the last five years so I've had to take on double duty. Yoga is my medicine, along with hiking. I try to do both about three or four times a week.

EGM: Talk about your Women's Leadership Initiative and the Burton Girls concept.

DC: In 2000, Jake said to me, "We've got a problem. At a meeting with 25 of our global directors, there were only three women at the table." Our company didn't start that way. We had been very diverse and promoted women athletes as much as males. But the surf-snow-ski-snowboard industry tends to be very male dominated. So we started to recruit, promote and retain more women. I developed the Women's Leadership Initiative 14 years ago to brainstorm and enact unbelievable changes. In 2002, women held 10% of the leadership positions within the company. In 2015, 40% of the strategic decision-making roles are held by women.

Burton Girls flowed naturally from this initiative. We started to develop clothing and product lines specifically designed for and by women, not just "pink and shrink" it. We welcome women into our

sport through the images and language we use. It's all about empowering women regardless of age or ability. Anyone can be a Burton girl; it's just an attitude.

EGM: Now on to food! How did you eat as a kid?

DC: Neither of my parents cooked. I learned how to cook at an early age because it was survival. At Christmas, I would ask for cookbooks. I gave my mom grocery lists and she was happy to fill them. My sister and brother were greatly relieved.

EGM: Describe yourself as a cook, as an eater.

DC: I'm a pretty relaxed cook. However, I was really serious about learning techniques. Once I got those down, I became more relaxed. Food should bring people together. I'd say I'm an inclusive cook and an adventuresome eater.

EGM: Jake and your sons—are they interested in food or cooking?

DC: I never gave in and let my kids say "I'm not eating that!" They always ate what Jake and I ate. So they share our passion for good food. I would get excited about things like fiddleheads! I taught all three how to cook. My oldest son came home from college and said, 'Hey, Mom, if you cook, everyone else cleans up!'

EGM: How has travel influenced your eating?

DC: Jake and I moved to Innsbruck in the 1980s, and I worked with sales and operations. In my travels, I always hit the cheese and bread shops before the snowboard shop. I was fascinated by the European tradition of separate shops for each variety of food. And I was amazed at the quality of the produce, meats and seafood.

In 2003, we took the kids out of school for a year to travel the world and see all six continents. That trip impacted all of us deeply. Stowe is a pretty idyllic place to grow up, and in the snowboard world, you travel to equally beautiful places—Colorado, Switzerland, Italy. We wanted our kids to get a broader taste of the real world. You can learn a country's culture by embracing the food and the locals. My youngest was the most open-minded by far.

EGM: What inspired you to open Harvest Market in Stowe in 1992?

DC: Being a working mom, I saw my kids getting pizza or Chinese takeout (again...). I did the whole cook-on-the-weekend thing, but I really wanted to find a place that would prepare the hearty, wholesome meals I would cook for my kids if I had the time. That became the impetus for opening the market. The year before that, I apprenticed at Ina Garten's shop, the Barefoot Contessa, in East Hampton,



Long Island. Ina then helped me design the layout for Harvest Market and shared her recipes with me. When I had the inevitable disasters, I could call her for advice.

My chef has been at the market more than 15 years, along with my manager. They stay true to the vision but keep it moving forward. I don't want the food to be too fancy. If you want fancy food, go to a restaurant. My favorites are the chicken curry salad and the egg sandwich on our homemade English muffin.

Our bread actually comes from the recipe of Gerard Rubaud, the former president of Rossignol USA. Gerard was a ski racer and his father was a baker in the Alps. His father insisted he learn how to bake authentic French bread. After he had retired from Rossignol, Gerard came into our shop one day and said, "You should have my bread here." He taught me how to bake his bread and we've had it there ever since.

I feel like really good bread is the one thing that will entice people out of their warm bed.

EGM: Describe an ideal weekend for your family.

DC: Snowboarding all day, then watch the Giants game. Jake cooks on Sundays and we usually have friends over. He makes a big fattening meal, like Brunswick stew, or beef or lamb roasts.

EGM: Joys of your job?

DC: Working with passionate, talented people.

EGM: Challenges?

DC: Being the owner and feeling responsible for other people's livelihoods.

EGM: What keeps you inspired?

DC: Our team. And the women at Burton. I'm so proud and inspired because I know that women have to work twice as hard as men. But we've changed the culture, paved the path, and younger women are coming along and making a difference, both in the company and in the sport itself.

EGM: Any parting words of advice?

DC: Take care of yourself as you balance work and home. I didn't when I was young. If you're not okay, you can't take care of other people. 🍁

Although Maria Buteux Reade doesn't snowboard, she heartily agrees with Donna's conviction about the allure of good bread.

Neither of my parents cooked. I learned how to cook at an early age because it was survival. At Christmas, I would ask for cookbooks. I gave my mom grocery lists and she was happy to fill them. My sister and brother were greatly relieved.

40th Anniversary Picnic!
Bouncy House, Balloons, BBQ, and Birthday Party!
Saturday, June 25th NOON to 2pm
Fun and FREE for the Whole Family!!
info@uppervalleyfood.com
CELEBRATE!
193 North Main St, WRJ, VT (802) 295-5804

firefly
taproom * tapas
restaurant
★ 575 depot street
manchester, vt
802.362.3721 ★

Advertise in
edible GREEN MOUNTAINS
and
watch your business grow!
sales@ediblegreenmountains.com
802-768-8356