



AMY C. COSPER

amy.cospers@familybusinessmagazine.com

COMMUNITY IS A TOUGH CONCEPT TO PUT YOUR FINGER ON, BUT WHEN YOU'RE A PART OF ONE, YOU GET IT.

COMMUNITIES drive change

A thousand strands connect us

Much of our experiences come from where we live — our neighborhood is a built-in community. Sometimes there are fences, sometimes there are guards, but there is always a shared sense of place. We are connected by that commonality. For me, an accidental cowgirl, that means lots and lots of cowboy stuff — and many trips to our local ranch store, which happens to be a family business.

The first time I walked into Jax Farm and Ranch in Fort Collins, Colo., I had freshly relocated to the city from Laguna Beach — flipflop-clad and wearing a red “Laguna Beach Lifeguard” hoodie. To say I stood out like a beach bum in the Yukon in January would be an understatement. One curious cowboy hat tip after another, I realized I was in over my flipflops here. Little did I know in a matter of months I’d become part of this group of cowboys talking about hay prices. (Important to note: My flipflops have since given way to cowboy boots — just as dusty and covered in horse poop as everyone else’s.)

Jax Farm and Ranch is a decades-old, family-owned mercantile located in the heart of northern Colorado’s agricultural and ranch communities. It is known for its convenience to those ranches and farms, and it’s a go-to for propane and diesel fuel. You can find horse feed, baby chickens, Wranglers and fence posts. It’s also where people gather to talk about the weather, politely discuss gas prices and compare notes on hay prices. Although I didn’t realize it at the time, Jax is a spot where people come together because they are linked by a common purpose. There is a sense of community here that I have since come to appreciate.

Community is a tough concept to put your finger on, but when you’re a part of one, you get it. Sometimes a company brand can create a sense of community around ideas. Outdoor retailer Patagonia is one of those companies. Patagonia’s powerful activist community is a global one with a single focus on environmental issues — driven by Patagonia’s sense of purpose. Other organizations create their own communities through corporate culture — the Google campus, for example. Community can be local, regional, national or global. It doesn’t matter where your community impact lands as long as you have one. Communities have the power to shift current thinking, drive trend lines and create movements. Movements can change the world.

Philanthropy and community bump into each other topically. But there is a distinction between the two. I ran into that conversation a couple times while doing research for this issue. I deeply believe community is much bigger than sponsorships and grants.

This issue’s cover story is a case in point. Sylvia’s of Harlem, a New York institution for 60 years, focuses on the power of family business in creating a legacy — and giving a voice to a community. *Family Business* writer Matt Villano visited the restaurant and got a chance to hear from Sylvia Woods’ successors on the challenges and responsibilities of being a community-driven enterprise. He also learned a thing or two about hot sauce and claims he gained five pounds on the assignment, although he looks fine to me.

Community is something you can find at a place like Jax or Sylvia’s or your neighborhood barbecue. But you can also find community on a WhatsApp Group or Facebook (and, by reading this magazine, you are automatically a part of a community). It’s a place — virtual or physical — where people with shared values and ideas come together. It is a powerful — and empowering — thing to be a part of a community. And we’re pretty damn glad you’re a part of ours. **FB**