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ROCKLAND, Maine — Two decades ago, Renee Philbrook was a stay-at-home mom with six children and a home-based bookkeeping business. Today, she is CEO of a mini accounting empire servicing small to corporate clients from Maine to Oklahoma.

“She has done so well for herself,” said Shari Closter, director of operations for the Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce. “She is very passionate about what she does. She is definitely a success story.”

In a still fragile economy, her company, [Philbrook & Associates](#), is poised for growth and expanding significantly. Her business has grown 29 percent yearly, even during the recession.

While there are no statistics on how many home businesses blossom into small companies in the region, most provide professional business to business services. Ninety percent of Chamber members employ 10 or fewer people. At 13 and counting, she has shattered that statistic.

The self-starter outgrew her space on Park Street and moved into a larger office on Walnut Street to accommodate her burgeoning staff. Now she is doubling her Walnut Street space.

Becoming an entrepreneur was not a lifelong ambition.

“I had six kids and decided to do something to keep my brain active,” said the 52-year-old, who joked that her 15-year business plan grew with her children.

She attended Gordon College in Massachusetts and the University of Maine which

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Rockland. The early hours prepared her for the working world.

In Philbrook's early days, her office was her dining room table. As business started to take off, she built a room off her living room. About a year later, with her client base growing, she hired her first employee. Six years later she hired another. The office quickly became cramped.

"I tried to keep my business separate from my home life, but it was becoming increasingly difficult," she said.

It was time to expand.

She moved to a 375-square-foot space in the Narragansett Building. "I thought 'Oh my god, this place is gigantic,'" Philbrook recalled.

But she didn't stay long. Three years later she relocated into a space five times as big. An investor fueled her growth making it possible for her to expand again. This month she moves into a sprawling 4,000-square-foot leased space in a Walnut Street complex downtown.

The company provides basic bookkeeping such as account receivables and account payables, job costing, payroll, bank reconciliation and development of business plans.

She works with tax attorneys but does not work on tax returns for businesses. The company does the preliminary work and passes it along to tax attorneys. They also assist in preparation for audits by testing invoices and performing a large behind the scenes work.

The accomplished woman credits her success to word of mouth, not advertising, of which she has done little. She's had referrals from banks and friends across New England.

There were bumps along the road, but none that she couldn't overcome.

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the country, including clients in New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey and Oklahoma.

Peter Berke, owner and operator of North Atlantic Painting Company in Rockport, said he could not be happier with the service that Philbrook and her staff have given him. Berke became a client of Philbrook & Associates five years ago when his then bank — The First — referred him to Philbrook.

“I was looking to control my grow my business and get control of things like bookkeeping and payroll,” Berke said.

With Philbrook's help, his business has grown 10 to 15 percent each year, Berke said.

“I'm sort of OCD. I find it difficult to give up control,” Berke said. “But since I have been using Renee's services I haven't written a check in years. I'm much less stressed, and I sleep at night.”

Jim Watson, who owns three small property development companies in Maine, and three health care organizations in New York and New Jersey, has been a client for seven years. He employs about 1,800 people and those businesses, such as Interim Healthcare of Greater New York, have been growing by double digits. Philbrook's ability to manage his accounts has allowed him to focus on future growth.

Philbrook has done such a great job, he said he was able to let his chief financial officer go, saving a bundle of money.

This year, Philbrook is focusing on attracting new customers from the Bangor and Portland areas.

With technological advances, she can do bookkeeping and other services for companies anywhere.

“I feel very fortunate. Financially, I’m a very conservative person. I’m conservative

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