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Southern California has long been a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts, from surfers and hikers to skiers and snowboarders. For Christy Snow, these activities are fine, but she prefers fun that includes the roar of an engine and has a little more RPM, especially dirt bikes, water sports, racing cars and dune buggies. She also loves working on the vehicles, which is why she works as a pit crew chief for a race team, and with a chase team during buggy events, including the Baja 500 and 1000.

What makes this Orange County resident stand out even more from the pack is her profession: She's an Enrolled Agent and principal of Snow's Financial Services (www.SnowsFinancialServices.com), a general accountancy practice in Orange, California, about 25 miles south of Los Angeles. While many might see this as an odd combination — an accountant and grease monkey/gearhead — it makes perfect sense for Christy, who along with her husband Daniel also owns an auto repair business. After all, she has mechanics on both sides of her family, so you could say that motor oil is in her blood.

 Christy started her accounting and tax practice in 2004, leaving her position as a corporate controller for the more independent entrepreneurial life. With 20 years in the profession, she had been in various corporate accounting roles since the age of 14, when she discovered a natural knack for the subject and was asked to manage the books for a private business. Yes, 14. Apparently accounting

is in her blood, as well. "I was probably an accountant in a past life; it just comes to me so easily. I love financial forecasting and analysis. It's just fun for me," she said. Fortunately, she's as comfortable in

a business suit as she is in a mechanic's jumpsuit, and has created a

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her to attract as clients.

"I've worked around mechanics and contractor services all of my life, so I understand their business processes and can speak to them in their language and with the terms they know." She says that business development hasn't been as much a focus as her growth might suggest; it's just worked out well through networking opportunities and membership in several business and civic groups. The business environment is also healthy in her area. "People are still starting up companies all the time, so they need accounting services." The tip she would like to give to more people, though, is this: "Don't open a restaurant. Restaurants seem to fail so quickly because of problems with staff management and keeping overhead down when the business is slow."

In addition to the more than 200 California-based businesses for which the firm provides accounting and consulting services, Snow's Financial Services has a growing base of international clients, including retailers and wholesale clothing vendors, some with offices in South America and Australia. "Technology has helped us reach beyond traditional borders and take on clients that wouldn't be possible otherwise."

Christy & husband Daniel on the Colorado River. With her business experiencing triple-digit growth, Christy also quickly found that staffing was one of the biggest challenges for a small practice. "Some people don't know what they say they do. So we now have working interviews where I'll put somebody to work for a week to see how they function in a real work environment. I can usually tell within two or three days if they're going to

work out.” She has also been expanding her own capabilities, and is currently

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as my technology partner; they are absolutely amazing and they're always available. That's important when your business relies on technology.”

She has a dual-monitor workstation for herself and just purchased four new laptops.

She also makes use of remote access technologies, which allow her to spend more time with her husband and four children, 17 year-old Eric, 14 year-old Justin, 10 year-old Dakota Marie and 7 year-old Kayleen Nelda-Lou. Even with this technology and with one of the shortest commutes in Southern California (only seven to 10 minutes to go three miles), she admits to still being tied to the office, especially since she has been running both the accounting practice and the repair shop while her husband has been recovering from back surgery. But at least being the boss has its perks.

“Even if I can't always make it home for dinner, the kids usually stop by during the day and hang out or do homework or even help with client work.” With the family home less than 10 minutes away, it makes it easy for them to share time together, even when work is demanding. With her husband's shop right next door, the two of them will also be able to see each other frequently when he recuperates.

Her respect for family also extends to her staff. “I hire people because of their brains and ability to get the work done, so if a staff member needs to keep their cell phone on or duck out to pick up or drop off their kids, that's just part of being a parent. The inflexibility of the corporate world when it comes to family matters was one of the main reasons I started my own practice. People just function and work better when they know that their family is taken care of.” Her dress code requirements are similarly oriented: Business casual is the rule of the day, but fun shoes are sometimes appreciated.

Owning her own practice has also allowed her to be more involved with her

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When she and her family can get away for a weekend or longer, and, when they aren't involved in one of the racing events, they often spend time on their land near Ehrenberg, Arizona, which is on the Colorado River. She hopes to eventually retire near there and have a ranch someday, but not anytime soon because she is still having fun.

"I could make a lot more money working as a controller or running a tax department for a large company, but I'd have to work according to their rules, and the work would be just work," she said. "I love what I'm doing now: It's different every day and I'm helping people." And even if working for herself often means longer hours, it's worth it because it allows her the ability to be more involved with her family. "People ask me why I work so hard, and the reason is that I have to because I just can't work for anybody else.

"I don't expect to get rich running my own practice, but I'd like to make enough money for my family to be secure and have fun." In the near-term, her goal is to get to the point where she can work more traditional hours, like 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., but she knows that, especially while her practice is still young, that dream may be elusive for some time, especially since business is strong in Orange County and her practice is thriving.

In the end, Christy loves being able to help businesses succeed, especially those that are having financial troubles, by working with them to develop strategies, allocate resources more effectively and get them logistical assistance. "It's great when I can drive by a shop that was almost out of business and is now successful and know that I helped them succeed. That's what makes my day."

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