



COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo Photos by Niki Rossi

Catherine Hover

Finds Joy in the Challenge

Catherine Hover likes a good challenge. In fact, if she feels like she isn't working toward something, she goes out to *find* something to conquer.

Originally from New Orleans, Catherine graduated with a degree in Fashion Merchandising and Marketing from The University of Southern Mississippi. She interned in Manhattan and considered going into magazine publishing, but she wasn't sure where she was going to call home. Her fiancé, Mark, was a survey engineer and travelling most of the year for his job. She needed to do a little soul searching to figure out what

she was going to do with her career and life. "It was a moment in my life when I had no clue and I was not okay with it. I needed something to work towards."

The one thing she did know was that she was tired of the travel and a long distance relationship. When Mark's job sent him to the Capital District in April 2011, they came here together, fell in love with experiencing four seasons and decided to stay. She first worked at a store on Broadway in Saratoga Springs while jumping into wedding planning mode. They married in October of that year, and

then Catherine once again found herself without something to do. She focused on trying to get out in her new town. "I had an 'ah ha' moment when I was on the phone with my mom, telling her what a difficult time I was having meeting people. She suggested that I try going to a paint and drink establishment to relax and meet people. I did some research and when I couldn't find one, I thought it would be a challenge worth taking on to start my own here."

Places like that were everywhere down south, but they hadn't hit up here yet, and without any nearby family or friends, Catherine was starting from scratch on her own. She also had never established a business before, but grew up watching her father, a custom homebuilder, run his. She knew owning a small business could be rough, but she also saw her

father's passion and recognized that it could be a very rewarding venture as well.

Deciding to risk it, Catherine and Mark took the money they were saving for a house and opened Saratoga Paint & Sip four years ago. The idea quickly took off. Two years later, they opened a studio in Latham, and in January of 2015, opened a third store in Burlington, VT. But the thing that surprises people most when they visit is that Catherine has no art experience. "I've always appreciated art, but felt like there was no way I could ever do that. I wanted something where you could drink and socialize – I like entertaining people. I feel like I'm bringing people into my home and it's up to me to show them a good time. I want them to have the overall experience of having fun and relaxing. Paint & Sip is so much more than just an art studio!"

Catherine works hard to make it all look easy. It's about living, breathing, sleeping the business – it doesn't stop. "I'm not a normal person when it comes to challenges. I'm very much driven by what people *don't* think I can do. What do they say? Shoot for the stars? I don't ever shoot for the stars. I always shoot for beyond."

It was a plan that worked. Each day Catherine watches people file in to lose themselves in the evening's art project. Sometimes they come for a special occasion like a bachelorette party or a birthday, and sometimes it's people just looking to de-stress. Catherine never knows who is coming, so each night starts off by finding out who is there and if they are celebrating anything. Depending on the answers, there might be a fun activity included, or they may just adjust the music playlist accordingly. After everyone checks in and grabs their drink, it's time to put on a smock and start the class. One of the artists leads the class step by step through the painting. At the end of the evening, they take a group picture

and everyone leaves with their own artwork.

"Our most important attribute as a business is that everyone that comes through the doors has a phenomenal experience," says Catherine. "It's not about the finished product. It's how you got there. We want our painters to feel empowered to do something they didn't think they could accomplish. It can sometimes be a really difficult thing to step outside of your comfort zone and try something new. We pride ourselves on showing them they can do it! People come back because of that feeling of accomplishment and at the same time de-stressing. It's unbelievably therapeutic to let yourself get lost in the painting that you're



completing. For a whole two hours, you're forced to not think about bills, kids, husband and that endless list of things left to do in your head."

Once the business was settled, Catherine needed a new venture, so she decided to run a marathon. She never ran before in her life, but her husband completed a triathlon in August and she thought it might be a good challenge for herself before she turned 30. To keep herself accountable, she signed up for the November 1st NYC Marathon through the Team for Kids charity. With six months to train, she downloaded the Hal Higdon app for guidance and has worked by herself to get in shape for the big event. While she still doesn't really like running, she's finding that she's enjoying the process. It gives her

a chance to clear her head. She listens to books and has worked on her mind control, realizing that she needs to think positive to keep going. But she loves finishing things, so she enjoys the feeling at the end of a run and is looking forward to completing the marathon itself.

When she's not checking challenges off her bucket list, Catherine enjoys spending time with Mark and their 18-month-old daughter, Posey. Mark no longer needs to travel now that he is a stay at



home dad, so they enjoy supporting the local community by eating out and participating in all of the local events throughout the year. She's also a member of a book club and the Executive Exchange group through the Saratoga County Chamber.

Catherine's self-professed wild and eccentric personality is contagious. You can't help but feel energized and positive around her. Her hard work and good attitude is apparent in every corner of her studio and life. And now that the marathon is almost out of the way, Catherine has just one more thing left on her list. "I just need to figure out what I'll cross off next!" she says. Challenge accepted.

Want to try an art evening yourself or have Paint & Sip come to your next event? Visit www.saratogapaintandsip.com. ■

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