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January 4, 2013

In the Spotlight | Westmont grad's tourism biz booming in Paris

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— Karen Reb would never argue with the expression that mother knows best.

Reb said her mother deserves all the credit for her becoming a successful tour guide in Paris.

Reb is the daughter of Charlotte and David Rudel of Westmont.

She is the owner/operator of Sight Seeker's Delight, one of Paris' top-rated businesses that offers unique walking tours.

Reb, 44, has always marched to a different drummer.

A 1986 graduate of Westmont Hilltop High School, Reb went to Harcum College in Philadelphia and attended Temple University to study music. She sings and plays flute and percussion.

She quit college and played flute for two

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Karen Reb, who founded Sight Seeker's Delight, which has become one of Paris' top-rated tourism businesses.

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bands with different styles in the Philadelphia-New York area. As a part of the 10-member E-Tribe, she added to the Afro-Cuban Latin hip-hop sound. She joined a six-member funk group called Tantra.

She became friends with a girl from Brooklyn, N.Y., who convinced her to go to Paris because there was a need there for American musicians.

"I was taking my turning-30 dream trip and never came back," Reb said. "After two months, my girlfriend returned to the United States and I teamed up with a guy, and we performed throughout the south of France and then the French Alps."

Reb's parents went to visit their daughter in 2001, and she took them to see the sites of Paris.

"After we toured extensively, my mom turned to me said: 'You would make a fabulous tour guide,' " Reb said. "A light came on in my head and I decided to go for it."

Looking back, she called it one of the best decisions of her life.

As a performance artist, Reb infused her talent into each tour, giving it a certain flair that few, if any, tour guides were offering.

"I read 50 to 60 books on French history and off I went," she said.

She was married in 2008, started her own company in 2009 and had a baby in 2010.

She and her husband, Frederic, a Frenchman, are the parents of a 2-year-old son, Azriel.

Her husband speaks only French to Azriel while she speaks English, giving the youngster a solid foundation for being bilingual.

Frederic Reb was brought up in a foster home and played professional handball in France before becoming a master plumber.

He now buys and renovates old buildings in Paris.

For Karen Reb, what started as a one-woman show has grown into an enterprise with 11 employees, seven of whom are guides.

"I found my niche," she said. "All my guides are professional actors and they all speak English."

Her business has flourished.

For the past two years, Sight Seeker's Delight has been listed as one of the top five things to do on Tripadvisor, a free travel guide and research website that assists customers in gathering

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travel information and posting opinions of travel-related issues.

"My business has exploded," Reb said. "Of the 760 testimonials on Tripadvisor, 750 have been rated excellent."

Tours run from 25 Euros to 60 Euros depending on the length of the tour, with the longest about four hours.

Reb learned the French language on the streets of Paris and still has an American accent when speaking.

"French is very difficult and even the French themselves have trouble with using correct grammar," she said.

Twenty years ago, French people were considered rude by most Americans.

"That has changed immensely because a new generation wants to show Americans that they can speak English and are more helpful to tourists," Reb said.

Reb said she is in the business of making memories for visitors.

"Doing the tours, we are on stage everyday," she said. "My tour guides are all professional actors who speak only English. About 80 percent of my business is American tourists, with many Australians and some Europeans."

Her guides specialize in taking their parts over the top to make things entertaining as well as informative.

She said her tours go to places that tourists normally don't go.

"We see all the popular things, but we go through back alleys and different sites to give them a true sense of the city," Reb said.

Her Paris along the Seine tour is approximately 4 1/2 hours long.

Popular sites include Notre Dame Cathedral; the Louvre; Pont Neuf, the oldest bridge in Paris; the Eiffel Tower; Champs-Elysees; and Napoleon's Tomb.

"I see a lot of empty nesters and senior citizens and most tours are designed for two to four people," she said.

The only slow months are November and February.

"From March to October, it is busy with as many as 800 clients a month," she said. "But between Dec. 15 and Jan. 15, it's our high season and it's just wild."

Her Montmartre tour, which is a little quirky, covers all the major artists who once lived in the area.

Artists who painted there include Vincent van Gogh, Pierre Brissaud, Gen Paul, Raymond

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Duchamp-Villon, Henri Matisse, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pablo Picasso.

Given her creative background, Reb's first scripts were composed for the Montmartre tours.

"Costumed guides take on the personas of the artists and inject humor and interesting trivia in a sound-bite manner," she said.

The tours not only escort tourists to the major sites, but provide information about the history of each location.

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Poll

Community minded: Recent grad will continue service projects in college

Kiersten Szczur is taking the values she learned in high school to college.



August 16, 2013 1 Photo

Building strength: Gym owner wants to make a difference in kids' lives

To call Fitness Weights and Aerobics simply a gym would be an understatement.



August 9, 2013 2 Photos

Woodvale man creates miniature incline from scrap

It's no exaggeration to say that Herbert F. Beas is the MacGyver of Woodvale. Just like the resourceful television hero, Beas solves problems with everyday materials he finds at hand, along with using his own ingenuity and creativity.



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August 2, 2013 2 Photos

Boyhood interest blossoms into lifetime endeavor



George Griffith is what you might call a flower guru.

Griffith, the co-owner – along with his partner, Tom O'Brien – of the Flower Barn in Westmont, has been passionate about all flowers and plants since he was a child, but it's the picturesque water lilies and ponds at his summer home outside of Ligonier that bring him the most joy.

July 26, 2013 3 Photos

Retiring pastor bids farewell to her congregation



The Rev. Eleanor Abarno retired as pastor of First Lutheran Church in downtown Johnstown on June 30, after serving the congregation for more than six years.

July 19, 2013 1 Photo

Staying involved: Even retired, teacher remains active as coach, adviser



Mindy Leonard enjoyed watching her students succeed during her many years as an educator, student council adviser and coach for the high school girls' volleyball team in the Shade-Central City School District. Even though she retired as a teacher at the end of the last school term with 33 years of service, she will continue to teach students about democracy, leadership and teamwork.

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about democracy, leadership and teamwork as student council adviser. Leonard also will remain as the head coach for girls' volleyball.

July 12, 2013 2 Photos

Doctor studies to become battlefield tour guide



Southmont resident Dr. Rick Schroeder is a self-proclaimed history buff, and his interest in the Civil War has led him to work toward becoming a licensed tour guide at Gettysburg National Military Park.

July 5, 2013 1 Photo

Civil War buffs help to preserve Johnstown's past



With the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address being celebrated in just over a week, Randy and Chris Beisel of Richland Township are eager to share their collection of Civil War memorabilia with other enthusiasts.

June 28, 2013 1 Photo

Veteran worker keeps school campus in good repair



What started as a temporary job for Bob Strittmatter turned into something a lot more permanent. Facing a layoff, he accepted a job as a custodian at Bishop Carroll Catholic High School on Jan. 15, 1982, and has been there ever since.

June 21, 2013 2 Photos

Student wants to bridge arts, underprivileged kids



At 21, Jei-laya Hassan is studying and planning for her dream. She plans to start her own nonprofit organization that would take every facet of the arts to underprivileged children.

June 14, 2013 1 Photo

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