

A teenager's first job

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Laci Larson at work at Pi Local in the Crescent B Commons shopping center. COURTESY PHOTO

Several factors determine whether a town is deemed to be a good place to raise a family. Is it safe? Are there good schools? Can you find plenty of family-friendly amenities nearby? Babcock Ranch checks all of those boxes and more.

A case in point is the Larson family whose oldest daughter, 14-year-old Laci, recently started her first job at the local pizza joint, Pi Local, in Crescent B Commons, which is only a 10-minute bike ride from their house in Trail's Edge. The high school freshman joins a handful of other 14- to 16-year-olds that take orders, prepare meals and perform cleaning duties at this popular new eating establishment. Laci usually works a couple of weekdays after school and on Saturdays, totaling about 12 hours a week.

Laci's mother, Danette, is thrilled to see her shy daughter come out of her shell and comfort zone to learn new life skills. "She's been able to get a taste of all the different aspects of working in a restaurant, including customer service at the cash register, which is great. She's an

introverted child, so watching her interact with diners, we're seeing a completely new side of her," says the proud parent.

Admitting her bashful nature, Laci remarks, "I'm very nervous when I'm working with the public, but I've gotten better at it." Her favorite tasks involve the preparation of salads and paninis. Although she doesn't cook at home, Laci volunteers at a cooking club that helps younger kids in second through eighth grade learn food preparation skills.

"As her parents, we didn't want to rush her into a job too soon," Danette says. "On the other hand, I felt like this was a really good opportunity for her to get some of those skills that are going to be important as she starts looking for something in the work force. She's learning good lessons when it comes to earning a paycheck, saving, being responsible with her money and not always having to rely on her mom and dad. She can spend her own money how she wants, and I feel that she's being very trustworthy with her money so far."

Danette loves that her daughter was able to find a job opportunity so close to home. "It's so convenient for Laci and our family," she says. "She gets out of school at 3 p.m., which gives her enough time to come home, drop off her backpack, get ready for work and bike ride to work by 4 p.m. My husband and I are both in the middle of work at that time, so we wouldn't have been able to drive her to a job when we were still living in Cape Coral, which is where we lived before Babcock Ranch."

Laci appreciates life in Babcock Ranch, where everything is close by — her school is within walking distance — and the streets are safe to ride a bike everywhere.

"I'm able to go hang out with friends here. In Cape Coral, we'd have to drive to my friend's house, but here we can just take a bike and go to the different places in Babcock Ranch and hang out. The streets in Cape Coral were too busy for me to bike."

Danette recalls the benefits of her own childhood in a small town of 500 people. "All of my friends' parents worked around town," she says. "They ran the bus company, worked at the post office and at the bank, owned a grocery store and ran the lumberyard and the butcher shop. It was such a great atmosphere to see our family and friends working in our neighborhood, and Babcock Ranch is creating a similar small-town vibe."

Looking forward, Danette believes that Laci is paving the way for her younger sister's success. "My 12-year-old daughter, Nora, gets to see her sister in action. I think it will encourage her that

getting a job isn't a bad thing. If there's opportunity out there for our kids, it's important for them to take it. While I never wanted to rush my kids into a job because I wanted them to just enjoy being kids, when they're in high school they have to realize that this is something they're going to be doing for the rest of their live; it's okay that a couple nights a week they can go out and be a part of the community they live in and learn some life skills in the meantime."

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