

CLOSET

CONFIDENTIAL

I own a robust paving business—and enjoy the world's shortest commute. **BY MARILYN GRABOWSKI**

EVERY MORNING I WAKE UP at 4:30, brush my teeth, and head to the office wearing pajamas. I don't travel far—my desk is in my bedroom's walk-in closet.

My husband, Tom, and I started our 12-employee firm, Atlantic Infra-red (atlanticinfra-red.com), in 2002 out of our home in Point Pleasant Beach, N.J. We own five trucks equipped with infra-red technology, which we use to restore asphalt surfaces, mostly on heavily traveled roads. Our revenues hit \$1.2 million in 2006.

At first I kept my work papers piled on the bedroom floor and used a little computer desk on rollers. But last year, when we finally turned a profit, I decided

to reward myself. I contacted California Closets (californiaclosets.com), whose workers came in, drafted a design, and renovated a 40-square-foot area in the front of my closet to fit a 36-inch desk and shelves. (My clothes still hang in the back.) It cost about \$4,000.

The construction business starts early in the morning—by 6:30 I'm on the phone talking to clients and directing employees in the field. I hold most meetings at the kitchen table, but if we need access to paperwork, we move upstairs to the closet. No one really likes being there. There's no air conditioning, and only one visitor at a time can fit, sitting on a kitchen stool. To limit clutter, I do almost everything on my laptop. I work

on a \$1,500 Dell Inspiron 9400 with a 17-inch screen (dell.com). My accounting system is totally paperless (QuickBooks Online Edition, quickbooks.intuit.com, \$39.99 a month), and I manage the firm payroll electronically with PayCycle (paycycle.com, \$50 a month).

When employees first see my closet, they laugh. Since our trucks cost \$100,000 each, they expect my office to be top of the line. They walk in and say, "Oh, my God. You really work here? There's no window!" But I don't care—it's cheap! Why waste money on office rental? Plus, I get to be home with my two young kids.

The biggest drawbacks for me are that I get no sunlight, and I never take a break. It's normal to find me working on Saturday at five in the morning because my office is right there. But being an entrepreneur is a 24/7 job, no matter where you work. —AS TOLD TO BRANDI STEWART

To give feedback or suggest a story, please write to fsb_mail@timeinc.com.

A HOLE IN THE WALL

The Manasquan River Inlet lies just outside, but it never distracts Grabowski in her windowless workspace.