

them," Lori said.

One way she's been able to provide needed support despite being deaf is through her ability to lip-read. She has her family to thank.

"No members of my family signed (learned sign language), so I got used to lip reading," Lori said. "And technology has really helped, through texting and video chat. If it wasn't for the technology, I don't know if my goal to own the business would have happened. But we have the technology that allows us to get everything done; the only thing I can't do is hear."

Plus, there are ways to communicate with family members who have just suffered a loss that needs no technology or spoken word.

"My way of communicating a lot of times when I first meet with a family is through things like hugs and expressions like that, to let them know we are here for them through the whole process," Lori said.

She admits being at a loss for words when she was informed recently that she was to be honored. The 2013 Governor's Awards ceremony was co-sponsored by South Dakota's Boards of Vocational Rehabilitation and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Department of Human Services.

"I never thought I would receive an award from the governor," Lori said. "It's a blessing from heaven. It validates that I mean something to the community – that my work is valued."

"I think of all of those years of hard work, of looking forward to meet my goals ... it feels like a validation ... that it has paid off," she said. "And the work that has led us here is going to continue

on into the future."

The inability to hear was not the only barrier Lori had to overcome.

"Back when I first started, this was a very male-run business. Women were not typically funeral directors. Being a woman, and being deaf was an extra-added challenge," Lori said. "I feel very blessed to own the funeral home here and be supported by the communities of Vermillion and Elk Point."

She's thankful for the support she received from her parents as she pursued her goal, and to her very first employer – a Maryland couple who owned and operated a funeral home, Richard and Ellen Rapp.

"I was one of their favorite employees there," Lori said. "I supervised all of their apprenticeships for the embalming at Rapp Funeral Home. Having the opportunity to work there let me know that this was something that I could do."

"In Maryland, I was doing a lot of embalming, and I didn't work with the families much," she said. "But when I came here and started working with Al, that's when I started working with families. I wasn't behind the scenes like I was in Maryland. I had a chance to start meeting the people, the members of the community, here."

February 2014 will mark the sixth year of the Kobers' ownership of their Vermillion and Elk Point funeral homes. Lori and Tom have been married for 24 years.

In that time, besides continuing the tradition of a successful funeral home business, the Kobers have built lasting local relationships.

EXPERIENCE continued on page 22

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