

# GeorgiaTrend

# SMALL BUSINESS

# GUIDE

2008/2009

- HOW TO GET STARTED
- HOW YOU CAN SUCCEED
- MANAGING YOUR PROFITS
- ENTREPRENEURS OFFER TIPS
- SURVIVING IN TOUGH TIMES
- ADVICE FROM EXPERTS
- 10 MISTAKES TO AVOID

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Al Wheaton of Wireless Remote Telemetry  
See his small business success story on page 32

A SUPPLEMENT TO GEORGIA TREND

## For the Georgia Woman Entrepreneur of the Year, starting her own business has been...

*“... the greatest adventure of my life”*

BY JENNIFER FRENCH ECHOLS

### Sue Ford believes the Small Business

Development Center's Georgia Woman Entrepreneur of the Year (GWEN) award is an excellent way to recognize the exceptional achievements of women in nontraditional industries. For an example, Ford, an SBDC area director in Albany, points to her 2007 nominee and GWEN winner, Monda Causey Mathis. “Monda has overcome many obstacles to earn a national reputation for quality work. She is respected. People in her industry know her. This is what the GWEN award is all about.”

Mathis is president, owner and project manager of DMS Services, Inc., which is located in Fort Gaines in Southwest Georgia. The company is doing well; in fact, sales increased approximately 45 percent in 2007. But it has taken a lot of hard work to get to this point.

DMS Services fabricates UL508A electrical and process control panels for utilities and heavy industries. The company, recently expanded, has supplied hydropower turbine rehab parts to plants in Alaska, Idaho, Utah, California, Washington, Georgia and Alabama for Andritz VA Tech Hydro, which repairs and upgrades these plants. Other clients include Georgia Power and the Southern Company.

A decade ago, Mathis was a journeyman electrician and control panel builder. While working on a construction site, she was contacted by an engineering company also working on the site. They were going to expand their chemical process systems, and wanted to know if she had opened a panel shop. She decided to start DMS Services.

“I had a good job with good benefits, but my husband, Don, encouraged me to go ahead, and he supported me, giving me time to build the business,” Mathis says. “We had a back-up plan — I could go back to work in construction if it didn't work out. We made sure we were secure enough that I could jump out there and give it a try.”

A search for customers led Mathis to the Albany SBDC office, where she met Ford. After providing a list of potential clients, Ford convinced her to certify as a woman-owned business and helped her complete certifications with the National Women Business Owners Corporation. DMS Services is also certified with CCR/ProNet, HUBZone (Historically Underutilized Business Zone) and Underwriter's Laboratories, among others.



**HONORED:** Monda Causey Mathis, right, receives the GWEN award from Cathy Cox, president of Young Harris College and former Georgia Secretary of State.

“SBDC's support was important from the very beginning,” Mathis says. “There was so much involved in getting started — from certifications and understanding taxes to electronic bid processes and manufacturing issues, just to name a few. I wasn't aware of how certification would help me. Sue showed me options I needed to follow up on, like the NWBOC — the only organization at that time that offered a nationally recognized woman-owned business certification.”

Despite multiple certifications and her firm's placement on more than 130 bid lists, Monda realized she would need to build relationships on the “inside” to allow her the opportunity to bid. Participation in Georgia Power's Mentor/Protégé program helped get her company's name in front of other divisions of the company.

Still, Mathis faced the challenge of persuading others to hire her company for big ticket projects. “From the beginning,



Monda was determined to pursue potential clients even after the door was closed in her face several times," Ford says. After Mathis hounded one engineer for weeks, his company finally allowed DMS Services to bid on a sizeable job to fabricate a process control panel for one of the powerhouses. One of five bidders, Mathis submitted the lowest bid she could manage and still earn a profit.

Two engineers from the company took a four-hour drive to Fort Gaines to check out the DMS facility on the Chattahoochee River. They were surprised to find a fully equipped control panel shop in the middle of rural Georgia. After inspecting the facility and going over the engineering prints, they turned to Mathis, "Why did you bid so low?"

"You couldn't ignore it," she replied. "You're here." She won the job and has received that company's repeat business. In fact, DMS Services is often anointed the "go-to vendor" after a company contracts for its work.

"DMS has been a valuable vendor to us for their dedication to quality, quick delivery and open communication," wrote Alfred Mairhofer, senior purchasing agent for VA Tech Hydro, in a November letter in support of Mathis's GWEN nomination. "We look forward to continue and extend this ongoing business relationship with DMS into the future..."

Mathis says the GWEN award was really unexpected. "It was awesome just to be in the running with all these outstanding

women business owners. It is truly an honor to be nominated," she says. "I have been so blessed." Rather than dwelling on past successes, however, she quickly turns to the challenges of the future.

"The economy and manufacturing are changing rapidly," she says. "DMS was supposed to be an all-electrical control panel manufacturing business, but it has morphed and regrouped into handling hydropower turbine rehab parts. This segment has grown from 15 percent to 80 percent of our business within the last 18 months. Fortunately, I was given the chance and had prior experience to build on. It is a constant learning experience to stay ahead."

"Ten years ago, I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to be where I am today. I owe a great deal of this to my husband, Don, who believed in me. Together we made the sacrifices and decisions to get here. At the end of the day, through it all, the tough times and the good times, this has been the greatest adventure of my life," she says.

Ford says Mathis has all the qualities necessary to start and run a successful national company — even from a small, rural location. "When Monda starts out to do something, she does it. When she realized she needed help to reach her goals, she wasn't afraid or hesitant to ask us for help.

"When you see someone with that much determination, it spurs you on to do all you can to help. You want to be a part of that accomplishment," she says.

## The Right Approach to Financing Launches Internet-based Business

BY JENNIFER FRENCH ECHOLS

### Ever wonder how a business is named?

Try this one on for size: FlyJane.net.

"Fly" is synonymous with 'hot' or 'glamorous' in today's fashion world," says FlyJane's owner, Donna Newman. "It represents young, hip fashion. 'Jane' may bring Tarzan and Jane or plain Jane to mind, but our Jane is that inner Sasha or inner hottie that every woman possesses. She's not plain. She's actually fabulous!"

FlyJane.net is an online retail store that offers glamorous, trendy fashion accessories, primarily handbags and shoes, to young women and those young at heart. The site's clever tagline narrows this segment even further: "Celebrity Fashion for the Diva on a Budget."

"You've got to be cool, get on your younger market's level so they know you're out there and targeting them specifically," Newman says. A member of her target demographic, Newman is an expert at how Internet marketing works. Prior to launching

her Web site, Newman was the operations manager for online marketing at Earthlink, an Atlanta-based Internet service provider. She executed online ad buys for the ISP and developed online marketing strategies for its products. After four years, she was ready to start her own Internet-based business.

"A specific demographic was, in my mind, untapped," Newman says. "It was my generation, young women aged 16-to-30, just starting off on their own." She says there were not a lot of Web sites that spoke to her, in a sense. "Just a handful of online properties were focusing on the young, progressive woman. This woman may not be able to afford the \$700 designer pumps just yet, but she wants to celebrate her womanhood, wear the styles that the celebrities in her favorite magazines are wearing."

Newman began selling women's accessories on eBay "to confirm my hypotheses of this particular demographic." She