



ANDREA ARENA

Service-oriented entrepreneurship

Andrea Arena can't believe her business is 11 years old. "I feel like I just graduated," says Arena, Mgt 89, who for going on a dozen years has run 2 Places At 1 Time, a concierge company she started in 1991 at age 24 with her \$5,000 savings.

Since starting the business as a one-woman show, Arena has had as many as 120 employees in 66 client offices across North America. With the economic downturn of the past two years, Arena says she has scaled back to 50 employees and lost a few clients (Enron and Arthur Andersen) but she credits her continued success to the "agility" of a small business.

Recently she was appointed to the board of trustees for Tech's DuPre College of Management and she joined the board of the nonprofit Atlanta Lyric Theatre.

"I always knew I wanted to be a member of the business community in Atlanta. I looked at the who's who of the Atlanta business community, and I knew I would be best served in getting a degree from Georgia Tech, especially as a woman.

"Because of the reputation of the Institute in the business community, if you walk in as a young, wet-behind-the-ears

person right out of school, it speaks volumes if your degree is from Georgia Tech."

At Tech, Arena was the first member of the Barbell Club, a membership to the weight room at O'Keefe Gym which was populated solely by males.

"You'd pay annually and they'd give you a key to go into this locked weight room any time of the day or night. I liked that because it was secure and I liked to lift weights, but it was a bit controversial because women didn't join the Barbell Club. It was this old smelly weight room," says Arena, who was also a member of the weightlifting club and worked as a teaching assistant for the coach who taught the weightlifting class.

"There was never more than one female in the class and all these men would walk in and the coach would say, 'This is Andrea, she's your teacher's assistant, do whatever she says,'" Arena says.

Although she got a job as a banking management trainee right after graduating, Arena says she always had an entrepreneurial bent.

"I guess it was kind of gutsy, but if you're going to do it, do it when you're 23 or 24 and you having nothing to lose," she says. "I had a rented apartment and partial equity in a Honda Accord. I figured the worst-case scenario was that it would be a total failure and I'd go get a 'real' job like my classmates. I think ignorance is bliss. The possibility of failure didn't enter into my mind. I never even considered that this would not work. You think, 'How successful can this be?' not, 'What if it fails?'"

And succeed it has.

Among the company's clients are management consulting companies, financial services companies, marketing firms, technology companies, retailers, employee services firms, insurance companies, computer corporations and energy and industrial companies, as well as busy families and individuals.

The company's workers will run any type of errand, as long as it's legal and moral, including dropping off dry cleaning, taking care of pets, meeting repairmen at people's homes, delivering cars to repair shops, making bank deposits, picking up prescriptions and buying and wrapping gifts.

"I think, with the turn in the economy, we got even more diverse. My first thought was to keep a hand on the pulse of the market and that was the best way to protect ourselves in a tough economy," Arena says.

Arena says she will continue to see what some view as obstacles as opportunities.

"At Tech, you couldn't help but stand out if you were a female, so I took it as my responsibility to stand out for the right reasons. You can't think people are not looking at you, so I saw it as a personal challenge and that's how I've approached the corporate environment.

"You can't help but stand out if you are a female at 24 and you are running your own company. That was an opportunity to stand out for the right reasons. There are inherent obstacles in that, but if you look at them as challenges rather than obstacles, you can do so much with that."

— Maria M. Lameiras