

WOMAN BUILT DREAM - HELPS OTHERS BUILD THEIRS - St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO) - September 4, 1988 - page 1C

September 4, 1988 | St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO) | Cynthia Todd Of the Post-Dispatch Staff | Page 1C

When the recession hit here in the early 1980s, Pat Woods found herself in the same predicament as thousands of St. Louis ans: She couldn't find a job.

Woods had a 6-year-old son and worried where she would get her next dollar.

She still worries today. But now her worries are the sort tycoons thrive on - such as where to find people to fill jobs in her multimillion-dollar operation.

How did a woman in her 20s make the transition from the ranks of the unemployed to become owner and operator of **Star Seven Employment**, which employs 300 people a year and has clients like Monsanto Co.? For Woods, it was a journey she started on a warm Monday in June 1981.

That's when she stood for hours in a line with 3,000 other people hoping to land one of eight jobs paying \$10.25 an hour offered by Procter & Gamble Co.

"I got there at 4 a.m.," recalls Woods, now 32. "I was somewhere near the number 2,000. It was the first time in my life when I found it impossible to find a job."

Woods had been in St. Louis nearly three years. A young woman who had been born in a small town in Mississippi, she had moved here from New York to get married. The plans didn't work out, but St. Louis appealed to her and she decided to stay.

As she stood with the throng seeking an hourly job, Woods decided that she never again wanted to find herself in that kind of situation.

She failed to get the job at Procter & Gamble. Instead, she worked in community service with a women's organization and then with the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis. In early 1984, she became the campaign manager for Freeman Bosley Sr. in his unsuccessful bid to become mayor of St. Louis.

That same year, Woods was offered a 120-day job as a painter on the assembly line at the Chrysler Corp. plant in Fenton. Tired of bouncing from one job to another, the spirited woman looked past the 120-day cap and saw an opportunity to develop the needed base for organizing a company that might provide her with stability.

"With the money I made (at Chrysler), I purchased vacuum cleaners, shampooers, cleaning supplies and began Star Seven Janitorial," Woods said.

Each day, Woods would report to Chrysler at 4 p.m., work her shift until 2 a.m., make the 30-

minute drive home to the College Hill area, shower, change clothes and operate her business out of her home and her small Pinto.

Exhaustion was a fact of life. But "I was on a mission," Woods said.

She had the help of a baby sitter, who juggled watching her two young sons with answering the phone.

Woods says the company - now called **Star Seven Employment** - started small, providing people to clean doctors' offices.

Sometimes she would clean offices herself. In retrospect, she says that was a stroke of luck.

"I remember one doctor who asked me why I was doing that kind of work," Woods said. "He said he felt that my employer was not being fair to me."

Then he learned she was the employer.

"The doctor began to help me with other referrals to other doctors," Woods said. "We began to build from there."

Woods' company continued along the same line for 2 1/2 years. So did her pace. The 120-day job had turned into a permanent position. And she poured every dime she made into buying supplies and paying salaries.

"There were days when I didn't have lunch money," Woods said.

But soon financial worries began to ease. Other companies, such as White's Janitorial, began using Woods' employees on jobs. She stopped operating out of her home and car and moved into an office in north St. Louis County.

In June 1986, Woods landed a \$700,000 contract with Monsanto.

That contract put Woods on stable financial ground and led to managerial training with Monsanto. It also gave her a chance to fulfill a pledge.

"I had said to myself that if I had the opportunity, I wanted to make the job search for others," Woods said.

The pledge has turned into a commitment. Woods, who says she has built her company based on a strong religious faith, said she tries to make sure that the homeless make up 20 percent of her work force. To provide them with skills, she has created Star Seven Achievement Academy.

"It includes theory and on-the-job training," Woods explained. "And we refer people to other agencies for day care, housing, food and medical services."

She said one of her unmet goals was to develop a cooperative program with the New Life

Evangelistic Center to get people off the streets and into productive employment.

"A lot of people think street people are ignorant," Woods said, frowning. "That's the biggest lie.

"They are educated. Maybe they were on drugs or maybe they went through a divorce. I wonder if I were in that situation, would I have the courage to start over? Would I have the energy? Maybe I would. Maybe I wouldn't. But I'd hope there would be someone to help me."

Business continues to prosper - so much so that Woods has been on administrative leave from her job at Chrysler. She is wrestling with the decision she must make this month on whether to return.

Meanwhile, other opportunities have surfaced for her at Monsanto. In June, Woods signed a multimillion-dollar contract with the company to provide temporary clerical help.

"I feel I was very fortunate to be allowed an opportunity to present my concept and for Monsanto to invest in it," Woods said. "I believe temporaries are the wave of the future."

Woods is making plans now to ride out that wave. By 1990, she hopes to have franchises in five other cities.

"That's the key," Woods said. "You've got to have goals. If you don't have an objective, then you never arrive."

She also has some short-term goals. She is looking forward to marrying Fulton Quinn Jr. next year.

"He, along with my sons, has been very supportive," she said. "He's had three years to become accustomed to my pattern. And I think we're in perfect harmony."

Woods says her sense of achievement is tied closely to her ability to help others.

"When you're able to get someone a job and he says 'thank you' . . . when he walked in bent over and then you can look out this window," she said, glancing behind her, "and see him walking with strength because he has a job, that's greater gratification than money can buy."

CITATION (MLA STYLE)

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff, Cynthia Todd. "WOMAN BUILT DREAM - HELPS OTHERS BUILD THEIRS ." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)*, THREE STAR ed., sec. NEWS, 4 Sept. 1988, p. 1C. *NewsBank: Access World News*, infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/0EB328E342CF99E6. Accessed 19 Nov. 2019.