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2013

The Executive

Special Edition
Featuring Top Women
Leaders of the Gwinnett Chamber



Engineering *Her Way to the* TOP

*The Story of Carla Carraway's
Climb to Success*

Executive Strategy

*A Simple Strategy for
Business Success: Find
the Right People*

Bottom Line

*"There is Never a Right Way
to Do a Wrong Thing" and
Other Guiding Principles for
Running a Successful Business*

News & More

Gwinnett Chamber



Engineering Her Way to the TOP



Precision Planning, Inc.
planners, engineers, architects & surveyors

Precision Planning, Inc. is a full-service engineering and architectural design firm headquartered in Lawrenceville, Ga., with satellite offices in Monroe and Savannah. Since becoming a Woman Business Enterprise (WBE) in 2010, it is Precision Planning's goal to build on the strong foundation established with local communities, while moving forward to meet the changing needs of their clients.

As a college student, Carla Carraway interned and worked summers at Precision Planning, Inc. (PPI), though she never imagined she would be the next president. Little did Carraway know, life had other plans for her as someone else saw her potential and took the time to invest in her success. That person was Randall Dixon, Founder of Precision Planning.

"From the very start of my career, I was lucky enough to have a mentor who guided, encouraged, and pushed me beyond my comfort level," said Carraway. "I had the

networking and civic opportunities including my involvement with the YMCA, Leadership Gwinnett, and Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful."

The leap into business development was an easy one for Carraway. "Having grown up in Gwinnett and now raising my family here, I have always been a cheerleader for Gwinnett," explained Carraway.

Carraway's evolution in the Chamber has now brought her into the role of Partnership Gwinnett Co-Chair where her Gwinnett roots are a natural fit for

The Story of Carla Carraway's Climb to Success

benefit of learning directly from Randall who encouraged me to branch out from my original accounting role into business development and marketing."

Carraway has touched nearly every aspect of the company during her 28-year career with Precision Planning. From answering phones and administrative work to finance and accounting, business development and human resources, Carla has done it all – except for engineering and architectural work, which she leaves to the hired experts. "With Randall as my mentor, it hasn't been a sink or swim for me. I always had someone guiding me and to this day the lessons he taught me contribute greatly to the decisions I make as president of Precision Planning."

With a background in finance, breaking into the business development and marketing world was the farthest thing from Carraway's mind, but with Dixon's encouragement Carraway embraced this new role wholeheartedly, starting at the Gwinnett Chamber. "I got started with the Chamber by attending networking events and by becoming an Ambassador. This opened the door for me to other

the position. "Nobody has to prep me. I get it," said Carraway. "I understand the importance of community and the fact

that what makes Gwinnett so attractive is that everyone works together."

In addition, according to Carraway, giving back to the community is what Precision Planning does. "The first thing that Randall did when he opened his business in 1982 was join the Chamber," said Carraway. "Supporting the Chamber and Gwinnett in this role is a natural

progression of Precision Planning's support for the community."

Precision Planning's involvement with Partnership Gwinnett and the Chamber not only shows their understanding that they are an important piece to the whole that makes up Gwinnett, but that involvement can contribute greatly to growing businesses. "When Gwinnett and the businesses within the county thrive, so does Precision Planning," said Carraway. "In addition, business is all about relationships and Partnership Gwinnett provides a platform to make vital connections with many of the individuals and organizations that are key to Gwinnett's success."



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The Executive Edge

Question & Answer Session

WITH MARY HESTER, CEO, LAN SYSTEMS

As the CEO of LAN Systems, Mary's company provides IT solutions in the greater metro Atlanta area. LAN Systems is dedicated to providing business technology that works.

As a computer systems expert, Mary works with many companies to get the highest efficiency from people and IT resources. She brings extensive experience managing a support and service group renowned for its "Best in the Industry" rating and standards. Mary is an expert in customer loyalty and retention and has designed and delivered numerous training courses and workshops on a variety of topics. Understanding that service must be consistent and always meet the customer's needs, Mary has developed a unique managed services model that provides personalized, high-quality services throughout the contract period. LAN Systems delivers this program with engineers and computer experts to many industries.

In this interview, Mary discusses her company's unique advantages, and her involvement with the Chamber, her take on the latest technology, as well as a bit of advice



for other leading women.

Q: How does LAN Systems' certification as a Microsoft Gold Partner benefit your customers?

A: Being a Microsoft Gold Partner/Top Value-added reseller gives us privileges only Gold Partners can obtain. For our customers, it means that we can get them priority service, special offers and other perks

only available from a company like us. For instance, we are able to sign our customers up for software rebates up to 15 percent on cloud and volume software purchases.

Q: How has your involvement with the Chairman's Club B2B Roundtables helped you and your company?

A: My B2B group has been together for four years. In that time, we have gotten to know each other on a level that is more like an advisory board. I wrote an article about our group called "Peeling Back the Onion" which tells the story of how we came to trust each other and our commitment to the group. They give me courage, confidence and a forum to test ideas. I learn something new

every meeting.

Q: What are some of the latest advancements in information technology that will benefit businesses?

A: Two words... cloud computing. It is really an old idea that has been given new life. The cloud is very similar to mainframe computers only with incredible graphics and amazing bandwidth. For small businesses, the cloud lets you work anywhere, anytime for a fraction of the cost of owning. If you study competitive advantage, you know that the cloud gives you computing power that gives you an edge. You have access to software, formerly only available to big companies with big budgets. The cloud is a revolution in technology.

Q: What advice would you give to other women looking to run their own businesses and climb the corporate ladder?

A: My advice is to be true to yourself, keep an open mind and have compassion for all God's creatures. A very good friend and member of my B2B group advocates working hard, paying attention and being a leader. I think that between the two of us we have the perfect system that works for both men and women. Specifically for women, give the team kudos, but be sure to take personal credit for success. There is nothing wrong with saying, "I did it!"

Engineering Her Way to the TOP (cont'd.)

Carraway's straightforward, down-to-earth approach to doing business has earned her success within the company she runs and the community in which she supports. "It's not just about me," explains Carraway. "There is a whole company of people who are willing to jump in and get things done. That is why Precision Planning is so successful. And the same can be said for Gwinnett."

Looking toward the future for Precision Planning, their client-oriented service certainly points them in the direction of growth. "We have a team approach and we steer clear of cookie cutter offerings," said Carraway. "Everyone on the Precision team has the

mindset that 'it is not our project, it is their project.' We are also unique in that we offer both engineering and architectural services giving a uniquely comprehensive and cost-effective solution for clients."

With offices in Lawrenceville, Walton County and Savannah, Ga., and the celebration of 30 years in business under their belt, expect to see more to come from this home-grown business and the Gwinnett native who runs it. "I am excited about what the future holds for Precision Planning and equally excited about my role as Partnership Gwinnett Co-Chair," said Carraway.