

May 2003

Daughter challenged with corporate responsibility in family's tech firm

by Aruna Jain

Staff Writer

May 2, 2003

Last summer, Mitchellville resident Lisa Harbour-Carter was a PTA mom, pregnant with her third son, and considering a future in real estate.

But fate turned sharply for her in December when her father, Wendell Harbour, died of cancer.

Harbour-Carter, who has a bachelor's degree in marketing from Hampton University in Virginia, took the reins of 10-year-old Wynnewood Technologies Inc., her father's engineering and management firm based in Rosslyn, Va. For the four-month period since her father's death, Harbour-Carter has had a crash course in corporate leadership.

"Every day is different," she said. "It's still hard to determine who you can trust."

She has attended board meetings, at times with her infant son Camden in tow, trying to keep up with "a huge learning curve." But among the benefits, she said, is that she has gained a new understanding of her father's passion for his business from his friends and colleagues.

"I get to learn another dimension of him," she said. "My dad had great relationships. Without [his colleagues] I wouldn't be able to do this."

The Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of Health and Human Services are the Wynnewood's two major clients. In July, Wynnewood was awarded a nearly \$3 million contract over four years to manage travel, correspondence and do some graphic design for the DOE. For HHS, Wynnewood does logistics work, including conferences, meetings, HIV prevention workshops at historically black colleges and universities, and small business advocacy work.

In 2001, the company procured a large Pentagon renovation contract. Harbour-Carter is now teaming up with other companies such as Booz Allen Hamilton and Triumph Technologies Inc. in Falls Church to procure similar contracts.

Harbour-Carter, who lives in Lake Arbor, said she is interested in opening an office in Prince George's County.

She has approached several key business and community leaders, including Major Riddick, who ran for county executive in the November democratic primary, and Gary S. Murray Sr., chairman of the Maryland Economic Development Commission and founder of Landover's HumanVision, to learn about opportunities in the county and the state.

"The way I'm going to build this organization is by building strong relationships," she said.

In 1993, Harbour started the information technology firm with the help of his previous employer, Dimensions International. Wynnewood staffs twelve, and occasionally brings in contractors. Harbour-Carter was one of those contractors who helped with marketing and communications upon her father's request.

On Dec. 7, Harbour-Carter's family held a meeting in the Georgetown University Hospital room where her father was recovering from surgery. They agreed that she would take over the company for the time being.

Ten days later, Harbour died after a three-year battle with colon cancer.

"Up until Dec. 16, we thought he would be OK," she said.

"Wendell, he had a wealth of knowledge," Lionel Carter, longtime family friend and Wynnewood employee, said. Carter, who is a project manager for Wynnewood's major client, the DOE, is confident in the new CEO.

"Wendell was doing this for 34 years and that's something you just can't learn overnight, but Lisa will learn how to do this. She'll learn how to appease clients and not be bowled over by them," he said.

Wynnewood recorded \$1.8 million in sales in 2002. Now Harbour-Carter is looking to team up with other companies in both Virginia and Maryland to gain other clients.

At home, Harbour-Carter gives her full attention to her husband and three sons. But when she's at work, work is her focus. She has even taken up a CEO existence. She just bought a set of golf clubs and will be taking lessons soon; she uses her cell-phone and computer to stay in touch with the office when she is out, and she has hired a public relations person to help her get acquainted with the county.

"Ideally, we want to grow, team with organizations and expand into new markets," she said.

E-mail Aruna Jain at ajain@gazette.net.