

Welcome to *The Business Journal's* fifth annual Women in Business Achievement Awards special section. We've been highlighting the successes of area businesswomen this way since 1997.

In this section, we profile each of this year's winners — 25 women who have made outstanding achievements in business in our area.

The award recipients were selected from nominations submit-

ted by senior managers, colleagues and employees. *The Business Journal* news staff also nominated women it considered worthy of recognition based on its coverage of area business.

Choosing the winners is never an easy task, especially with the number of nominations we received this year. As in years past, our mission is to bring to the forefront the broad array of contributions women are making in the business community. This year's

class of 25 reflects the increasing diversity of industries where women are making an impact.

To help celebrate the accomplishments of these women, *The Business Journal* hosted a Women in Business Achievement Awards luncheon at the Hilton Charlotte & Towers.

The luncheon's keynote speaker was Darla Moore, president of the Rainwater Inc. She is profiled below.

*The Business Journal* would

like to thank the sponsors who help us make this annual event such a success. Our presenting sponsors are Deloitte & Touche, Kilpatrick Stockton LLP and Salomon Smith Barney Inc. Our supporting sponsors are Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse and First Union Corp.

For more information about the Women in Business program, contact me at (704) 973-1140.

Jeannie Falknor  
Publisher

Ann Depta thinks "soft skills" is a misnomer — people skills are just as important as understanding a balance sheet in successfully running a business.

Depta is president of Meridian Consulting Group, a management consulting company she founded in 1990 after eight years in employee training at First Union Corp. She's found increasing demand for her services as companies struggle to integrate corporate cultures after a merger or in companies that are undergoing rapid growth.

"Most MBA programs are inadequate in teaching the people skills needed in organizations. The lessons might not take anyway, if the students don't have much work experience."

That leaves plenty of opportunity for Meridian, which posted a 52% gain in revenue last year from 1999.

Meridian spent much of the last year helping Wachovia Securities maintain productivity, morale and profitability after the purchase of Interstate/Johnson Lane Inc. During the merger, the company realized growing divisions between financial advisors and support staff. Meridian was called in to foster "internal customer service."

Based on input from both sides, Meridian was able to identify needs and suggest solutions. "Basically we help back office and support staff understand the value of internal customer service," she says. "That ultimately means better external customer service as well."

Meridian provides services aimed at executives, such as leadership development, team building and coaching. This can be done in one-on-one sessions or for groups.

For example, Depta helped an executive overcome resistance to changes he was



## ANN DEPTA

President  
Meridian Consulting Group

*Ann Depta is owner of Meridian Consulting Group, a small management advisory that's become an important part of training executives at Wachovia Securities and other corporate clients. The company posted a 52% gain in revenue in 2000, and the challenges of training others to manage people should long provide demand for her services.*

*"People skills are often called soft skills, but they are often harder to master than the so-called hard skills."*

brought in to make; being a "quick and direct" Northerner didn't help. "We tried to get him to understand what the others were feeling and to get him to pace them instead of going gangbusters."

Depta's strategy is to help executives come up with as many as 10 alternatives to solving a problem. After putting them into practice in the workplace, she'll review the results.

At Wachovia, Meridian has been leading middle managers through a program dubbed "Influencing with Integrity," which is designed to instill leadership skills. The 3-day program focuses on teamwork, goal setting, flexibility and risk taking, among others. The purpose, she says, is to create a culture that focuses on meeting objectives instead of assigning blame for failures.

Much of Depta's recent work has been helping Wachovia Securities' associates cope

with the uncertainty following the announcement of the merger with First Union Corp. — both organizations have large securities operations in Charlotte.

"It's a time of ambiguity and so it's been particularly important for the company and its staff to remain focused," says Depta. "My job has been to help them stay positive and productive until the dust settles."

The former school teacher runs her company as a "one-woman band," hiring three facilitators on a contract basis and two on an administrative basis.

She remains active as a mentor with women in the business community and has

given numerous talks to women's groups including The American Society of Women Accountants and Charlotte Women Executives. Depta also serves on the board of Kinder Mourn.

—Scott Martin

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