



Oft-honored Dunwoody executive is pioneer in energy

By Fran Memberg For The Crier | Posted: Monday, August 22, 2011 6:29 pm

Dunwoody resident Livia Whisenhunt will soon have a much easier commute to work. In September, she will relocate her corporate headquarters from Clairmont Road near Buford Highway to Waterford Office Park on North Shallowford Road in Dunwoody.

"I'll be able to ride my bike to work," said Whisenhunt, the president, CEO and founder of PS Energy Group, an energy and transportation solutions business.

An easy commute to work is a small reward for a woman who has built a successful company in a male-dominated field.

Whisenhunt founded PS Energy in 1985. "No women were in the business. That was a challenge," she said. But not the only one.

"It was a challenge being a start-up selling a great big commodity," Whisenhunt added. "Here I was selling this big thing and I was just a little bitty company, just me."

As a bulk wholesale marketer, PS Energy provides transportation fuels, emergency fueling and fleet management services to business, industry and government. The emergency fueling program provides fueling services nationwide to industry and utilities in times of crisis or whenever natural disasters strike.

Whisenhunt, 52, said her entry into the industry "just happened." At one time, she owned a horse. In her 20s, "I sold the horse, bought a convenience store, sold the store and went to work for a company doing different things including wholesaling fuel," she explained. When she lost her job, she started her own company.

PS Energy now employs more than 30 people, and over the years has been recognized with numerous awards. Among them are the Administrator's Award for Excellence by the U.S. Small Business Administration for five consecutive years; Lockheed Martin Aeronautical Systems Subcontractor of the Year for two consecutive years; Supplier of the Year by the Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council in recognition of energy-based relief efforts during Hurricane Katrina; and a distinguished industry leader by the Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council's Georgia Plus Program.

Whisenhunt has received personal recognition as one of the nation's Top 40 Under 40 by Entrepreneur magazine; Small Business Person of the Year by the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce; Southeast Wholesale Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst & Young; Entrepreneur Blueprint Award by Atlanta's Women Looking Ahead magazine; and Innovator of the Year Catalyst Award by Business to Business magazine.

"Every time I get [an award] it surprises me," Whisenhunt said. "It makes me feel humble. This is business as usual to me. [Working] is all I've known to do. I didn't go to college. An opportunity presented itself. I've worked hard."

Whisenhunt was also selected by the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's (GHCC) Blue Ribbon Committee as the 2010 Hispanic Business Woman of the Year. Although she was born in Auburn, Ala., and is a graduate of Stone Mountain High School, her mother is a native of Colombia.

"I have helped people from Colombia, given them [job] opportunities when they came to the U.S.," said Whisenhunt.

One of those is Adriana Acevedo, who started at PS Energy 11 years ago as a marketing assistant. She is now director of strategic servicing, handling purchasing, supplies and distribution, among other tasks.

"Livia is a very smart woman," said Acevedo. "She appreciates people who understand her approach and want to move forward. She recognized my skills and brought me to an executive position. I learned everything related to the industry [from her]."

Her employees and customers are of utmost important to Whisenhunt. "Do better for employees, do better for customers. That's what drives me," she said.

Her advice to other entrepreneurs? "Look after your business and it will look after you."