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RECOGNITION BANQUET

Tuesday, February 25th
Lost Spur Golf & Event Center, Eagan
7:30 a.m. registration | 8:00 a.m. Brunch

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2014

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Relationships matter

Jennifer Smith co-founded Innovative Office Solutions with an eye to the future

by Jennifer Chick

SUN THISWEEK
DAKOTA COUNTY TRIBUNE

Jennifer Smith founded an office supply company in June 2001 focused on making people more productive. Her company has quickly become one of the largest and fastest growing office solution companies in the country.

Smith is president and chief executive officer of Innovative Office Solutions, a business that offers office, facility and educational supplies along with furniture and fulfillment and managed print services. Innovative Office Solutions strives to be a single source solution-based company coupled with an office productivity focus.

"We have grown our business by 265 percent since 2008 by investing in people, technology and new business categories," Smith said.

She credits much of her business success to Jack Guze, a mentor from Dayton-Hudson Marshall Fields.

"He taught me to treat people how you would like to be treated," she said.

Smith said the most significant opportunity for Innovative Office Solutions has been growing by acquisitions. In three years, Smith hopes to see her company listed as a \$100 million company.

"Jennifer has many key qualities that make her a successful leader, most notably, her commitment to treating all employees, customers, and vendors with the same degree of respect and fairness," her nomination letter said. "This is both a personal and professional core value that she leads by, and also sets Innovative apart from their competition. She and her employees take great pride in being one of the top six fastest-growing woman-owned companies in the United States."

Smith co-founded Innovative Office Solutions with 21 employees.

According to her Exceptional Businesswomen nomination, "With a 'Relationships Matter' belief system, Innovative's intent was to change what customers can, and should, expect from suppliers. The company quickly became one of the fastest growing multi-million dollar office supply companies in the Midwest."

Now, at a time when the office products industry is in decline, Innovative Office Solutions is expanding into new business categories. The staff has grown to more than 120 employees with double-digit revenue growth for the past seven years. The company recently opened a 30,000-square-foot furniture



Jennifer Smith

showroom in its Burnsville headquarters at 151 E. Cliff Road.

"At the beginning of 2008, a time when most companies were downsizing due to the recession, Jennifer's vision focused on growth through hiring, expanding product offerings and investing in technology," her nomination letter said.

She was also involved in founding Medcare Products in 1998 and served as president of Medcare from 1998 until the founding of Innovative Office Solutions in 2001. She continues to serve Medcare as an owner, board member and chief executive officer.

Smith's focus and drive extends past her company and into the community.

"We give back to the community in many different ways," she said. "Our employees give back every quarter by picking one of our nonprofit partners to donate our services to along with charitable programs that we sponsor through our current sports team partners."

Those programs include donating up to \$5,000 for every field goal kicked to the Minnesota Vikings Children's Fund, donating up to \$5,000 to two local nonprofits for each Minnesota Twins double play, and sponsoring the Charity of the Month through the

Minnesota Wild, which gives local nonprofit exposure for one month during the hockey season with a television commercial and a tradeshow booth at the game.

"We also have a new venture that we are involved in called the In Sports Foundation," Smith said. "We sponsor local underprivileged children, allowing them to go to summer camps and participate in their schools' sports programs."

"In keeping with Jennifer and Innovative's commitment to giving back to the community, she has led in the establishment of both funding and fundraising opportunities for over 100 local nonprofits," the nomination letter said.

Smith is involved in many business organizations, including the WPO, WBENC, and C200 and is currently involved with the mentor program for the Women Venture Organization. She is currently serving on the Steering Committee for the WBENC, the Dealer Advisory Board of United Stationers, and the Board of Governors of the National Office Product Alliance, along with serving as a board member for I See Me.

Smith encourages women professionals to work hard to make a difference.

"Never give up," she said. "Work hard and believe in all possibilities, and you will make a difference."



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Jennifer Smith - CEO



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