

WOMEN TO watch

GENES, GENIUS AND GENEROSITY

The desire to succeed on their own, then give back by helping the less fortunate must be in their genes. Charlene Gorzela and Marlene McGuirt are not only identical triplets (sister Darlene lives in California), they both have built thriving businesses and still make considerable time to volunteer with charitable organizations. "I believe that I have to give back because people have helped me," says Charlene. "I don't do it unselfishly. It gives meaning to my life," Marlene agrees. "Being part of charitable projects is selfish, in a way, because it also motivates me and makes me feel good," she explains.

After working in the personnel business for 21 years, Charlene started her own staffing company in 1991 with little money, the financial help of a friend and one employee. Without a college degree and the necessary resources, "the odds were against having my own business," she remembers. Today, her company, Mack & Associates, bills more than \$2.7 million and employs 17 people in six departments. The firm provides staff solutions to companies ranging from small entrepreneurial firms to Fortune 100 corporations. Charlene plans to expand internationally, possibly using Internet technologies.

The sisters definitely motivated each other throughout the years of learning and labor. Each triplet appreciates the healthy rivalry that has provided "the



Marlene McGuirt and Charlene Gorzela. Photo by Mitchell Canoff.

most wonderful networking situation" but also propelled them to do better and to develop as strong individuals.

Charlene came to Chicago at age 18 with only \$175. "I went to SWU—Street Wise University," she recounts. "I did a lot of experiential learning. And some of the hard times have been my greatest coaches." She always maintained "confident optimism" to overcome difficulties and to take the next step. "Tough choices come with it," she says. "When you know your core values, the decisions get simpler. I just want to keep open-minded and be willing to change."

While enjoying her success, Charlene wishes to return the help and advice she

relied on during difficult times. She has been involved with numerous non-profit organizations, holding leadership positions with Hazelden, a foundation helping chemically dependent people, and Rotary One. She also volunteered in the chemical dependency department at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. The desire to help enriches her life. "I try to surround myself with people who want to make a difference."

Marlene McGuirt's professional and personal development has come to a similar conclusion. A marketing graduate from the University of Illinois, Marlene began her career in the restaurant business as a director of special events. She built her

own company, Leave It To M.E., a successful event marketing firm. "Then I reached a point when I didn't feel that I was contributing," she recalls.

During that time, Marlene worked for several nonprofit organizations. "There was an added value. It wasn't the all mighty dollars. It was being part of something bigger," explains Marlene. After a one-year office management position with Hazelden, Marlene was hired by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation as director of special events and development. She proved especially effective at getting people involved in charity causes and conveying her own enthusiasm while working with donors. "I let them know—and I truly believe—that they're making a difference."

Marlene is currently taking a career break to indulge in the fun with her newborn twins. "My personal life has changed a lot, but my professional life is still on course," she says. Next summer she plans to finish a Master's degree in philanthropy and development at Saint Mary's University. The education will allow her to "have a bigger effect" in more cause-related function of the nonprofit business.

Determined to make an impact, the sisters continue to seek challenges that inspire them and others. "If you make up your mind to do something, you're gonna do it," affirms Charlene. "We're here on earth to create, and we've got lots of opportunities to do just that." ■

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