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Local Woman Becomes Business Wiz • By Chad Selweski, Macomb Daily Staff Writer



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Misty Delegato had no experience as a CEO and no expertise in the medical field. But she had an idea, a plan to create a new kind of in-home health care company. And five years later she has developed a firm that has grown from a fledgling operation with three workers to a business with 119 employees, two locations and a third site on the way.

"We're doing pretty well," Delegato, 42, said with a smile. "In this economy, we're doing really well." So well, in fact, that Delegato's Mount Clemens-based company, Relevar Home Care, was selected by Gov. Granholm's administration to receive the state's 2008 "Best Small Business -- Main Street USA" award.

Today, the entrepreneur will be singled out by Macomb County board Chairman Bill Crouchman in his annual State of the County address for her contribution to the local economy, and on Wednesday Delegato will be presented with a tribute from the Board of Commissioners. Delegato's first step toward becoming a business whiz came in 2002 when she turned to a relatively obscure government agency, Macomb County's Small Business and Technology Development Center, for advice. The Harrison Township resident was working for a business that provides companies with temporary workers, and her idea was to create a new firm that would supply substitute nurses to hospitals and nursing homes.

Bob Madigan, SBTDC business consultant, convinced Delegato to study the field more carefully and she responded with a revised plan: offering home health care services for people released from hospitals who still require some level of nursing care. Delegato, who holds a bachelor's degree in marketing and a master's degree in management, worked with Madigan on the paper work, legal structure, business plan and marketing strategy.

Relevar was born in 2003 and quickly tapped into a niche in the health care industry. The company provides in-home care ranging from basic companionship for the elderly to skilled nursing for young people with traumatic injuries. As the number of clients approached 80, caregivers were added to the payroll, along with case managers and a business administrator.

Delegato now has 54 full-time and 65 part-time workers and she said she tries to match the personalities of caregivers and clients. Hiring quality workers is the key to her success, she said, explaining that her test is simple: "Would you send this person to take care of your mom?" Madigan, who handles about 400 business clients a year, said Delegato stood out from the beginning.

"You try to put a game plan on paper," he said. "But implementation is the key to success in business." Delegato "lives and breathes" Relevar six to seven days a week, but she still keeps in touch with Madigan for guidance and encouragement that keeps her on the path toward profitability.

"Bob has become a mentor to me. He is my cheerleader and also holds my feet to the fire when need be," she said.

Delegato will be honored by the Michigan SBTDC at an April event at the Lansing Center. Gov. Granholm is expected to be on hand as several awards are presented to small businesses. The Main Street USA award is bestowed on the "best of the best," according to state officials, based on the selected company's impact on the Michigan economy, exemplary management, profitability and job creation.