



WONDER WOMEN



AWARDS
Women Entrepreneurs
in Atlanta Awards 2003



ADDIE MATHES
Prime Power Services Inc.
Woman Business Owner
of the Year



MARY S. RODRIGUEZ
HiRod Consulting
NAWBO-Atlanta Member of the Year

ANDREA FOX
Epic IT Inc.
Rising Star



ANN STALLARD
Graphic Communications Corp.
Inspiration



PHOTOS TAKEN AT ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDEN
PHOTOS/RYON E. SMITH

NAWBO Atlanta

The National Association of Women Business Owners-Atlanta partnered with Atlanta Business Chronicle to recognize women entrepreneurs for the second annual WE Awards. Winners were scheduled to be announced at an awards dinner on May 1 at the Crowne Plaza Ravinia. Sara Blakely, founder and president of Spanx, and a well-known Atlanta woman entrepreneur, was the scheduled master of ceremonies.

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Mary S. Rodriguez raised profile of NAWBO in Atlanta

By Jan R. Costello
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The garden of a home near Oglethorpe University speaks volumes about its owner and caretaker. "She has one of the most beautiful yards in the neighborhood," said Susan zumBrunnen. "It's just a joy to drive by and see her yard."

The garden, ablaze with a wide variety of azaleas, irises and other flowers this time of year, is the showy outcome of years of effort, much of it below the surface in the preparation and cultivation of the soil. Nothing could be more symbolic of the efforts of Mary S. Rodriguez — at work and in the community. She often toils behind the scenes, never hesitating to take on the nitty-gritty detail, so that the outcome will be a vision well-realized.

Rodriguez's efforts on behalf of the National Association of Women Business Owners in Atlanta earned her the 2003 award of Member of the Year. She joined NAWBO three years ago, and immediately pitched in to create effective means for women to share advice, to recruit corporate sponsors to help fund education and mentoring programs, to raise the profile of NAWBO in the community and to increase membership opportunities.

All this while working full-time as co-owner of HilRod Consulting, a finance and administration consulting firm. The company turns around troubled businesses, formulates comprehensive business plans and helps companies grow. Company revenue grew 30 percent to 50 percent in 2001 and 2002, and Rodriguez says it is on track to grow 40 percent to 50 percent this year.

As a business owner for 15 years and a business consultant for 20, Rodriguez knows that women business owners need a means of getting advice and feedback. Two years ago, Rodriguez served as moderator of a NAWBO mentoring group called

the CEO Roundtable. She was shocked when only two people showed up. She personally invited members to come to the next meeting and, now, the group is considered a vital part of the business owners' routine.

"We are a great support system for each other," Rodriguez said.

The group of women hail from diverse backgrounds: law, marketing, business and other fields. The group serves as the business owners' personal board of directors, without the cost.

Rodriguez actively recruited sponsors for the organization to help pay for programs to educate and mentor women business owners. She developed a PowerPoint presentation showing the benefits of sponsorship and called on many businesses, gaining the sponsorships of The Coca-Cola Co., United Parcel Service Inc. and Bank of America. She shared the presentation with other chapters at a NAWBO national conference.

"She has significantly impacted our ability to raise funds so that we can continue with the programs that we hold near and dear — to foster and promote the success of women business owners," said Mary Riley, president of the Atlanta NAWBO chapter and an accountant with her own firm. "She has been unflagging in her follow-up and determination to make sure corporate Atlanta knows who we are and what we do."

Rodriguez helped develop a Web site for the chapter, recruit a public relations expert to broaden awareness of NAWBO and served on the board of directors for two years, one as secretary and one as vice president of strategic alliances (the corporate sponsorship program), through which she raised \$17,500 for the organization.

The energy to take on these projects comes not just from her organizational skills (she keeps a color-coded calendar) but from a passion for



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helping women succeed.

Now, she is helping women find that support structure in business. "Most women are quite willing to share their knowledge," Rodriguez said. "That's why NAWBO works so beautifully. Women can talk about business, seek help from other entrepreneurs and ask questions."

Rodriguez is also active in a number of other professional organizations. She helps raise money for the Atlanta Women's Foundation and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

She serves as president of the Cambridge Park Civic Association, a two-year commitment serving a neighborhood of 200.

"She took us from a legal pad, back-of-the-cocktail-napkin type of thing to making us a corporation," said neighbor zumBrunnen. "She really brought professionalism to the organization."

For Rodriguez, the efforts have been a way of giving back and becoming deeply rooted in her community — at home and work.



**NAWBO-Atlanta Member
of the Year**

A woman business owner and a current NAWBO-Atlanta member in good standing who has made exceptional contributions of time, energy and resources to NAWBO-Atlanta, and in so doing has been instrumental in helping the organization to thrive and grow.