

EXECUTIVE SUITE

Purple Martin

Liz Martin: Hatching experience at Martin Insurance

By Lori Baer

Her jubilant laughter reverberates through the office. "My dad put me on the payroll at 8. I tell everyone I've been working for 33 years," she says, roaring with laughter. "I hated it, and he said, 'Some day you'll thank me for this!'"

For Liz Martin, owner agent of Martin Insurance Agency and a farmer's daughter, that day has come. "I found when I came into the insurance business I worked that much harder than people who have been in the business all their lives and are used to working 8 to 5, getting vacations and holidays."

Liz graduated from Elizabethtown College with a bachelor's in business administration and a minor in English. Her father needed help with his chicken hatchery business, and so she spent the first 8 years out of college hatching baby chicks and managing about 25 people.

Taking Flight

Between college's sophomore and junior years, Liz enjoyed the summer with her uncle who operated a small insurance agency on Manor Avenue in Millersville.

"A week after I finished my finals at E-town, I actually got my license in property and casualty insurance thinking I could do that part-time and still work at the chicken hatchery. But the chicken hatchery was many, many hours. So I still always wanted to get into insurance."

Concerned for her aging uncle's business, Liz left the hatchery in May 1996 to work for him. In October that year, she purchased the agency and moved the business that November to its current location on North George Street in Millersville. Liz will relocate again this summer to a recently purchased building next door.

She's fourth generation owner for Martin Insurance, which has been passed

down from her great grandfather, to her grandfather, to her uncle. "It's a family business, but I don't have family working here."

No blood relatives, perhaps.

Her Brood

Liz speaks about her staff as loving as family. "People are one of my passions. I like having a great team of people that I work with; I like seeing them develop; I like the fact that they give me ideas; and I like the fact that we can go to Christmas parties and happy hour and have fun together."

Liz's management approach plays a role in Martin Insurance's ability to operate as a functional family. "Communication, communication, communication! I always say 99 percent of all problems are the result of lack of communication."

She explains the agency's tiers of monthly team meetings, emphasizing it takes time, energy, and effort to foster positive employee relationships. "We are constantly communicating with each other."

Communal by Nature

"One of the things I've appreciated so much about being successful is truly being able to give back to the community. Giving back to the community isn't a right, it's an obligation."

Liz certainly walks the walk. She serves on the boards of the Farm and Home Center Foundation, Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Rotary Club of Lancaster, and the YWCA of Lancaster. In 2006, she received the Lancaster Chamber's Athena Award, and in 2003 she received Elizabethtown College Business Alumni Association's Rising Star Award. She is also a graduate of Leadership Lancaster.

Liz encourages her employees to volunteer too. She matches volunteer

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Photo by Cindi Dixon

Liz Martin, owner agent of Martin Insurance Agency

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hours with employees' hourly rate and donates their "earnings" to charity. Her staff also volunteers with the Long's Park Art and Craft Festival, YWCA's Race Against Racism, Big Brothers Big Sisters' Bowl for Kids Sake, and at The Mix—a hang out for inner city kids where the staff delivers a hot meal every month.

"I'm proud I can employ other people who can have a viable life and give back to society. Not everybody has the opportunity to do that."

Defending Territory

Liz identifies her parents as her greatest influence. "They taught me to do what you say you are going to do and led their lives by example. I get my business sense from my father, compassion from my mother. My mom says I'm the best of both of them."

Liz is also fifth generation owner of Iron Stone Spring Farm, the 85-acre family farm in Manor Township. After an injury, her father had trouble maintaining the farm. Liz, youngest of three, stepped to the plate.

"I talk to my farm manager once a day. People in the office think it's funny how I'll be on the phone talking policy to someone one minute, and the next I'll get a cell call from Larry and be talking about cows. I love it," she says howling with laughter.

Liz is building a natural grass-fed beef business with a Black Angus herd now numbering 35 breeding stock. This year she kept a steer for slaughter for the first time—and named him T-bone.

"Hey, you have to mentally prepare yourself," she jokes.

Range

Travel is big in Liz's life. She's been to China, Korea, and South Africa. Future plans include Dubai this March

and next year, she hopes, a second Rotary Club mission trip; her first mission trip was Brazil in 2004.

"When you give yourself a couple weeks away from your business, you can really rest your mind and you come back refreshed and often have different ideas that ultimately help your business."

When not migrating the world, Liz is hiking, playing squash, or reading—having just finished Nelson Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* and John Wood's *Leaving Microsoft to Change the World*. Oh, she's also contemplating helicopter lessons.

"It's important to do things in your personal life that are outside what you normally do in business. We do this as business owners all the time—always doing things we didn't think we could do—that's why we are successful as entrepreneurs."

Field Marks

She hands over an index-sized card printed with the agency's values, vision, and mission; a large poster in the conference room reads the same. "This is not created by me; it's created by all of us," Liz explains proudly. "As you see, 'fun and humor' are mentioned under 'shared values' and 'energizing mission'—we try to maintain a sense of humor," she chuckles.

Humor and fun balance the busy pace of her professional and personal lives much the way the color purple balances the warmth of red and coolness of blue. Maybe it's her lavender office walls or the violet radiating from her blouse that balances Liz's drive for success with strong sense of place.

"I'm a big purple person. I like to wear purple at least once a week," her rich laughter breaks again behind that genuine smile.



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