

SAN DIEGO Metropolitan MAGAZINE

Barbara Bry

Putting good ideas to work

SERVING SAN DIEGO'S BUSINESS COMMUNITIES • JUNE 1997

After years of helping small technology companies as director of programs at UCSD's Connect, Barbara Bry decided to try life on the other side of the table. She didn't quit her Connect job but used numerous vacation days and off-work hours to create a company with "significant other" Neil Senturia. Together they founded ATCOM/INFO, maker of cyberbooths that offer home-away-from-home access to the Internet with one swipe of a credit card.

Tired of dragging his laptop on business trips just so he could log in and check his e-mail, Senturia hit on the idea for the public Internet kiosks. After their initial research, Bry got out her Connect directory and starting making the contacts that turned the idea into a company. ATCOM found its law firm, banker, accountant and public relations firm through Connect, and Bry and Senturia hired a Connect member to design the prototype.

"It's been very exciting and nerve-wracking," she says. "But I understand in the pit of my stomach what it really takes. It takes a team, it takes a lot of guts and a strong stomach." The company has several of its cyberbooths installed in airports and hotels and is negotiating with telephone companies to buy and install the 21st-century phone booths in other locations. Bry no longer is involved on a day-to-day basis but remains active as a company director.

At the same time she was sticking out her neck and savings for ATCOM, Bry continued to expand Connect's program offerings. Since turning her part-time Connect

appointment into a full-time post four years ago, the program's budget has grown from \$750,000 to \$1.6 million with new programs she developed. Assisted by a "terrific staff" of 13, Connect has marshaled 500 members and sponsors, all of whom are willing to volunteer their time to help, she says. "It's allowed us to do more for emerging growth companies," she adds.

Bry developed and raised the money to support a new monthly TV talk show addressing issues affecting technology companies, such as mergers and acquisitions and shareholder lawsuits. Bry is host and executive producer

of the UCSD-TV program. Several shows have been taped and aired and two other educational stations have picked up the program. Bry hopes to interest the public television network in the show.

Another new Connect effort is InVest, a program to help entrepreneurs find early investors and mentors by building a network of local executives and potential investors. "Venture capitalists are doing fewer and fewer early-stage company deals," she says. Bry is tapping affluent retirees who live in places like Rancho Santa Fe and Fairbanks Ranch as well as more visible high-tech executives with the wherewithal to invest \$25,000 and up. Connect also is one of eight nonprofits participating in Electronic Angel, sponsored by the Small Business Administration. For a fee, companies solicit investors on-line. Private investors will be able to access the information through private passwords. A Connect seminar discussing the topic will be held this month.

Bry won't take credit for the ideas but says her journalism background taught her an all-important skill she uses daily. "I don't have any ideas of my own but I'm really good at listening," she says. "They tell me what they need and we implement it. I'm able to create, conceptualize and implement.

"We have the opportunity to make this (city) a really great place," she adds. "I am participating in making it happen."



Barbara Bry, 1990 TWIN

—Libby Brydolf