

## **Becky Levin's remarks for the Alumni Award Banquet**

Thank you, Martin, for that kind introduction, and I thank everyone here for attending this dinner tonight. I appreciate that you took the evening to share this honor with me, and in some of your cases, traveled significant distances to do so. There are many recognizable faces here, certainly;

My wonderful husband Mark and my 10-year-old daughter, Samantha;

Several of my college buddies; Roxanne Hunt and Vanessa Swanson and Anne Prout, who remain three of the smartest women I've encountered in my life;

And perhaps the best calculus teacher ever, Marilyn Witty Fish who taught here for many years;

Gina Costello, formerly of US Trust and now from UBS who flew here from Boston-we met as board members of the Newport International Film festival;

Reed Prior who I have placed as a CEO twice in the past and Neil Warma, a client who came all the way from Canada to share this night with me.

I am very flattered you came.

I had not been in touch with UNCG since graduating in 1979 with an undergraduate degree in Business. Imagine my surprise when Dean Weeks and Mary Ellen Boelhower invited me to lunch a year ago during their trip to Boston. We had a wonderful lunch and a wonderful glass of wine, I might add, and reminisced about the late 70's at UNCG's Business School. We spoke of common friends, professors and student teachers and discussed the University's incredible growth over the past 29 years. But back in 1979, the Business School was still a baby, just celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In the 1978-1979 school year, enrollment in the Bryan School was 1280 students. This year, 2007-2008, the school's enrollment has almost doubled to 2,286 students. The Bryan School now offers 9 majors to its graduates compared to the

four offered in my year of graduation and students have 154 classes offered compared to the 108 when I attended.

I left our lunch with a warm feeling, remembering how special our school was, primarily because of the people and the entrepreneurial culture. It's been my experience that anytime great people are grouped around a blossoming goal, such as the Business School back in the 70's, great things are bound to happen. It's not surprising that the School has become one of the more distinguished Business School's in the country. And something great certainly happened to me at UNCG during that time, that I will share with you tonight. But back to the luncheon story, we said our goodbyes and shared with my family what a great day it had been. The next thing I knew, I was being nominated then selected for the Bryan School Distinguished Alumni Award from the school that provided me with the best educational experience of my lifetime. What a lunch-now that's what I call a 'Power Lunch'.

I had transferred to UNCG from another State's University because of my recent marriage and subsequent relocation to North Carolina. Mark had been hired by the newly opened Miller Brewing Company facility in Eden, North Carolina and I wanted to attend UNCG to complete my education. I was a bit apprehensive about the transfer because we knew no one in state; much less the School, and frankly I had only average grades from my other Institution. I was scared to death. Mark and I visited the admissions office together and told them our story. We were greeted with genuine enthusiasm, as they wanted to support families relocating to new businesses in North Carolina. They interviewed me, scanned my SATs and then assured me I would get into the school. I was treated with so much acceptance and southern hospitality that I immediately loved the environment. And the following days only reinforced that first impression.

So what was the school like back then?

1. Unlike my previous University experience, I did not feel herded into lecture halls and endless lines nor did I feel like just a

number. Here, class sizes were small and intimate which encouraged open discussion and every teacher or professor I encountered cared about me and my various points of view (which were numerous at the time).

2. This small but growing business school made learning fun. For instance, we were exposed to the case study method of learning early in the program where groups of students were assigned to a real live business in Greensboro. At the end of that semester, our grade was based on our strategic business plan that was eventually presented to the company's owner. So early in our training we were exposed to the issues that small businesses face which I believe greatly impacted my career choices.
3. A third intriguing aspect of the school was the mix of people I encountered. I was taught by tenured professors to graduate student teachers, men and women. It reinforced my thinking that there was more than one approach to success, as these teachers were living examples of the different career paths one could take. Some of my teachers were headed to Fortune 500 companies or came from one, some became lawyers, some started consulting businesses and others, like Dean Weeks, stayed at UNCG and continued to build an amazing school. This diversity of people was stimulating and existed also in the student body. I learned with African American students, International students, gay students, poor students, rich students, Hispanic students, Asian students, Continuing Education Students and Executives taking night classes as a work requirement or towards their MBA. The older students were particularly fun to have in class because they brought real-live work scenarios to the conversation. The variety of people in both faculty and student body taught me a great appreciation for diversity, its value in business and the Boardroom. Having an environment where all these perspectives were valued and encouraged, at all levels of the school, enhanced my understanding of people. This is an invaluable asset in business, a Human Relations career and more importantly, in life.
4. Lastly however, UNCG's culture instilled confidence in fellow students and me. There never seemed to be a focus on failing in this environment but rather on how well you could do. I think this was particularly true for my female colleagues. "Try new things and don't be afraid to fail" seemed to be the motto;

creativity was encouraged and expected of us. Perhaps because the school once had an all female student body or perhaps because my generation was one of the first female populations to have all career paths open to them, this environment embraced and empowered our desire to excel on our own merit, have an opinion and to share it with others (which I frequently did). I remember when my Strategic Marketing professor asked me to participate in a research group evaluating the merits of having a business degree offered at the University. There were questions at the time about the value of a degree in business versus humanity, for instance. Was a Business degree truly a scholarly pursuit? If so, should it be a BS degree or a BA degree, and which was more competitive in the marketplace. Should the degree even strive to be competitive in the marketplace? Given that the Business School was only nine years old at the time, it was an incredibly open discussion to be having with the surrounding business community, professors of all disciplines and students who were banking on the degree itself to enhance their career. My professor never voiced a concern that we may come up with a wrong answer or a politically incorrect conclusion. Though guidelines were suggested for the project we were asked to be creative in our approach. The focus was on process and what we concluded from 'our' work. This is just one example of how the business school nurtured a can-do attitude, interacted with us as adults, trusting that we had the skills and judgment to address such a question for the Embryonic Business School. (Insert school stats)

This is a snapshot of what the Business School was for me in the late 70's.

I remember very vividly a spring morning in 1979 after having just completed my treacherous Accounting exam. I was pretty sure I aced it. Life was good. I was newly married to the love of my life, supported by this incredible school and husband, and embraced by a passionate, creative and entrepreneurial culture. I felt so special and all the people surrounding me, at all levels, were special. And eclectic. The Business School was new and full of potential, and I felt so much a part of it. I was

on top of the world at that moment. Walking down College Avenue and those beautiful Bradford Pear trees that line the street were all blossoming...and so was I! In this diverse, vibrant, blooming Business School on a spring day in 1979 is where I found my entrepreneurial instincts and myself.

Now I own and founded two companies. The eldest has offices all throughout the country and in London. But I can't say I knew where I was headed in 1979-it took some trial and error and I needed some business experience. Though I felt prepared to conduct strategic research projects and counsel CEO's right out of school, no one else did! My first role in a big company was in sales service and not at all the role I had expected to be playing. I handled one very small task around the selling process and was placed in a very small box in the organizational chart. That lasted about 2 years but it was a start. The Biotechnology industry was calling Mark and I to the West Coast to be part of a very exciting new industry that was just starting around DNA technology. The California culture was very open and stimulating and the scientists were incredibly smart and risk takers. I was lucky enough to land a position as a recruiter for a retained firm staffing Genentech, Inc. Those phone skills in sales service were my in. After three years, I went out on my own and have never looked back. I've been riding the entrepreneurial wave ever since. I love what I do, love the culture of my industry and have built a company that I can be proud of.

What's ahead for me is unknown but as my photograph on the cover of tonight's program suggests, what's old is new again. Certainly, I will replicate what I do best; create a vision that is exciting, surround myself with great and diverse people who are also passionate about what they do and together we will use our creativity to craft something of value. But most importantly, have fun. Two ideas on the table for me now include; expanding Levin and Company by opening a North Carolina office and creating a non-profit organization with Mark geared at mentoring high risk teens on how to be entrepreneurial and create enhanced futures for themselves.

In summary, I am so glad I attended UNCG. I would certainly encourage any student to explore this environment and the Bryan Business School. Though I have always teased my daughter, Samantha, that she could only go to college at Boston University, MIT and Harvard so that she can stay within driving distance of her family-UNCG would be my favorite choice for her. Again, thank you for this honor Dean Weeks. It was unexpected and is incredibly heartfelt.