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FROM THE TOP

Finding success in helping people find good people

BY DON MANLEY

Florida Weekly Correspondent

CJ Hueston has loved sports since childhood, both as a spectator and as a participant.

She was a track athlete in high school and a field hockey player in college. She came to share her father's love of auto racing while growing up near Indianapolis. Eventually, she got behind the wheel, qualifying



HUESTON

in the top-five in her first race and continuing to drive competitively as an adult.

The passion, competitive spirit and risk-taking nature that fueled those pursuits also helped produce Ms. Hueston's success as an entrepreneur. She is president and CEO of Corporate Dimensions

Inc., a Naples-based executive search/recruitment and career planning and development firm she founded.

"So many times you talk with a CEO, and they're very black and white when they talk about their company," she said. "With entrepreneurial types, when you talk to them you hear the passion for what they do. Even though I've had the company since 1998, I'm as excited today as I was back then. That's what it's all about: having the passion and the fire to work with companies and clients every day to find that successful match."

CDI's executive search client base includes companies large, small and in-between, start-ups and nonprofits, many of them local businesses that want to recruit nationally.

"That's what I want to do is make a difference for organizations and companies in the assets they hire and in career planning, to make a difference as individuals decide what their professional path will be or if they've come to a fork in the road and want a change," she said.

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Ms. Hueston began her professional life as an educator, spending 12 years as a teacher, principal and administrator in the Collier County school district. Her intrepid side shone through with her next career move, becoming president of International Automated Energy Systems, a subsidiary of The Barron Collier Companies, for 13 years.

"I had always thought I would be in education," she said. "I loved education. When this opportunity came up, I'm a risk taker and I thought this would be good for me from a growth standpoint."

Under her leadership, IAES grew from regional to national in stature and from a staff of four to 150 employees around the country.

It was Ms. Hueston's dissatisfaction with the recruiting firms she encountered during her time with IAES that led her to start CDI after IAES was sold.

"With my foundation in education and my experience in the private world as a CEO, and growing from a small R&D firm to a nationally recognized one, I felt I had the skill set to understand what companies would be looking for," she said.

She entered the field with an appreciation for the importance of having a good staff.

"People make an organization," she said. "There is nothing more important than the people you hire for an organization. Your people are your prime



COURTESY PHOTO

CJ Hueston inherited her love of car racing from her father.

asset, and if you do not hire the right people, you will not be able to move your company forward."

She also knows that having a healthy competitive spirit is vital to being a successful entrepreneur. "That is what allows you to really reach out and be innovative as a leader and not be worried about failure," she said. "You have to have that sliver of being a risk taker, or you won't think outside the box. If you're always worried about failure, you're not going to be a dynamic leader."

She credits her upbringing with freeing her from the constraints of traditional male-female roles in Western society.

"I grew up in a home where perceptions were out the window," she said. "As a female, you could do whatever you wanted to do. Just because you might wear a skirt instead of pants, that doesn't make a difference. It was a very supportive home."

The self-described workaholic has also made time in her schedule to devote to community service.

She has been chairman of the board for the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce and the organization's Leadership Collier Foundation, and she's also a Leadership Collier graduate. She was a founder of Leadership Collier's Youth Leadership program, and as chairman of the chamber's education committee she established a line of communication between the community's business leaders and Collier County educators.

She has received several awards for her community service, including the 2004 President of the Year award by the President's Forum of Southwest Florida and the 2014 Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce Volunteer of the Year award, which recognized her for leading her Leadership Collier Alumni Foundation team to create the celebration for Leadership Collier's 25th anniversary.

Most recently, she was named the 2016-2017 recipient of the Leadership Collier Foundation Alumni Association's Distinguished Alumni Award for her continued education and work toward community solutions in the public interest.

"I am reminded that leadership is about pulling together other leaders and emerging leaders for projects, committees, sponsorships, etc., resulting in an impact for our community. That is what I am most proud of."

Interview with CJ Hueston

Business words of wisdom: "A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new." — Albert Einstein

Favorite business book: "Leadership Rules" by Jo Owen.

Two things you look for when hiring: (1) Cultural fit (2) Passion. ■