



Leading the way for women entrepreneurs

BY ROBERTA JAMES

Sharon A. Burton

Sharon A. Burton didn't think twice about heading up a transportation and logistics company in a mostly male-dominated industry. As a matter of fact, it was her ideas that grew the company that she eventually took over.

As president and CEO of Robart Transportation Inc. and the RL Services Group LLC, Burton began her career in transportation as a traffic manager for a specialty chemical company based in Atlanta.

She was in that role when ABF Freight Systems recruited her. There, she worked her way up to district sales manager and

ultimately became terminal manager for one of the largest facilities in the Southeast. Under her guidance, it became one of the most profitable in the entire ABF system.

She joined Robart Transportation in 1989 as executive vice president and in 1994, she started its transportation management and consulting division, The RL Services Group LLC. In 1996, she took over her current position as president and CEO of the two companies and in 2004, she bought out her partner and became the companies' sole owner.

The Robart Companies provide transportation and supply chain solutions for

shipping, receiving and distribution specializing in no-touch LTL service, truckload, flatbed, as well as van and air shipments throughout North America.

Burton's guiding philosophy in her company is to add value to her clients.

"We preach it here; if you're looking at a bus situation and we're not adding value, walk away because it won't last," she said. "Our job is to make the customer's decision to use us, a good decision. I tell everyone in this company that if we fail, that customer fails whoever they are reporting to."

The Robart Companies are certified women's business enterprises, which are not the norm in the male-dominated industry.

However, Burton said she sees roles changing in this industry and across the board.

"For a long time women dominated the air freight industry," she said. "When I began in sales, there were practically no women selling in LTL. Now, we see more female truck drivers. We're seeing women reaching out to non-traditional roles in many industries to make a living."

Burton said leading the company has given her an opportunity to demonstrate that women are capable of many accomplishments.

"I've been allowed to raise the flag and send the message that women can do whatever they chose to do because it is an unusual industry for women," Burton said. "I spend a great amount of time mentoring business owners in all walks of life. I had no mentors and it is extremely important for a woman who wants to do something on her own to know that with a business plan, organization and the right people around her, she can do whatever she wants to do."

Burton currently serves as second vice chair on the Georgia Women's Business Council board of directors. She also chairs the GWBC's Voice Committee as well as volunteers her time in various organizations. She is the southeastern representative for the National Forum of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council, and an active member of Women Impacting Public Policy as well as the United States Women's Chamber of Commerce.

Burton is a mother and grandmother of three. After losing her only son to cancer in October 1998, she helped start the Herring Foundation of Hope, dedicated to the education, support, and fostering of hope for newly diagnosed cancer patients. She heads the organization's sponsorships and donations. 