

Faith: Key to BETAH's success

by Brian Gilmore | Special to The Gazette

Wilhelmina Bell-Taylor, president of the Bethesda-based consulting firm BETAH Associates Inc., said her business success is all about faith. Faith in herself, faith in her talented staff, and on a personal level, a strong spiritual faith that she says is central to her life.

"My grounding professionally and in my life has been my faith," Bell-Taylor said.

In fact, she said her reliance on a spiritual underpinning to navigate the business world is so important to her that when she was selecting a name for her company in 1988 she sought the advice of her pastor. Together they scanned a Bible index and located "Betah," a Hebrew word meaning "trust and confidence," from the Old Testament.

It is, perhaps, that self-assured approach to business that enabled Bell-Taylor to guide BETAH Associates Inc. onto Inc. Magazine's 500 list last year. Riding a 965 percent increase in revenue (from \$497,000 in 1995 to \$5,390,000 in 1999), BETAH joined very distinguished company with the annual award given by Inc. to the best performing small companies (when they began, Microsoft, Domino's Pizza and Timberland were also featured in Inc.). "It was exciting to go through that process with Inc. Magazine," she said. But most exciting, Bell-Taylor said, is her work at BETAH.

On any given day, BETAH employees can be found providing library referencing services through the National Library of Medicine, media relations for the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, technical assistance services under the Ryan White Care Act or conference planning for various clients involving today's modern technology. Bell-Taylor described the work as personally important to her as well as service oriented. Most of the work is being done through BETAH's contract with the Department of Health and Human Services. Bell-Taylor's efforts to make a difference in this area have not gone unnoticed either.

Miguel Gomez, senior policy analyst with the Department of Health and Human Services, has worked directly with Bell-Taylor for eight years on programs with the agency and believes it is her special talents that have made the company so successful.

"She understands the breadth of a complicated public health system in all communities, but especially in communities of color," Gomez said. "She is able to facilitate projects between the federal government and community leaders, which is a unique talent."

Those unique talents were showcased last year when BETAH presented a satellite video conference through the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General and as a result received the prestigious National Aegis Award for excellence in non-network commercial productions for the video industry. The his-



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torical event, which was simulcast from the campuses of five historically black colleges, allowed U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher to discuss AIDS in the African-American community with prominent medical experts, community

leaders and the general public. It is these types of endeavors which continue to build the reputation of BETAH and which also allows Bell-Taylor to make use of her past experience as a schoolteacher and educational consultant to inform communities of pressing health issues.

Yet, it was her work as director of programs for the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise in the 1980s under the guidance of its Executive Director Robert Woodson that wedded her business skills with her people-oriented business vision. Bell-Taylor described the work at NCNE as "compassionate" and the experience there with Woodson as "tremendous." Woodson, a Bell-Taylor compatriot for 20 years, called her "one of the most gifted and brightest people" he knows.

"She is an example of a person who came from the non-profit world to the profit world and took the same commitment she brought to the not-for-profit world to the profit world," Woodson said.

Appropriately, NCNE was BETAH's first client in 1988 when Bell-Taylor was operating the business alone out of her home. "I started my company with no capital and no resources other than a computer and a fax machine," she said. Working long hours on that first contract with NCNE, Bell-Taylor built a reputation for good work and solid performance. Soon, there were so many requests for Bell-Taylor's expertise that she had no choice but to expand her business.

By 1992, BETAH was located in a small office in Bethesda and most importantly, had received certification in the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program that assists socially disadvantaged businesses. Thirteen years later, BETAH is graduating from the program and the demand for the company's services has not waned. BETAH boasts more than 60 full-time employees, 8,000 square feet of office space in downtown Bethesda, and an impressive client list.

Bell-Taylor's goal for the future of BETAH entails more of the same. "We will be working on projects which build effective communication venues in underserved communities," she said. "I always just wanted to do quality work and render services that benefit people. It is nice to make money, but that was not my primary motive for going into business. I wanted to do something to make a difference."