

## **Female leaders say many of their biggest challenges aren't unique**

(November 5, 2006) — In 1976, newlywed Irene White arrived in Rochester from her native Germany with no specific career in mind.

While her then-husband worked at Eastman Kodak Co., White studied English, tutored German on the side and eventually earned an English literature degree from State University College at Brockport. After graduating, she began working at Berlitz, the international language learning company.

But White said she soon came to believe that she had a more innovative teaching method than her employer did.

"I didn't like the method I was forced to use, so I decided the only way to test your own ideas is to open your own business," said White, president and chief executive of Language Intelligence Ltd., ranked No. 80 in the 2006 Rochester Top 100.

White wanted to do away with traditional instruction. "I wanted to create an environment where people could relax and make these strange sounds and learn," said White, who can relate to her clientele because learned a new language herself.

Language Intelligence specializes in teaching and translation. Since it was launched in 1988, it has grown from a handful of employees to 12 full-time staff members, a group of 45 language teachers and a worldwide freelance network of more than 400 translators who work in more than 60 languages.

Clients have included small local businesses and large corporations such as Eastman Kodak Co., Bausch & Lomb Inc. and Corning Inc. The business will soon expand its office space, and it expects to hire three more people before the year ends.

Language Intelligence is one of 10 companies in the Top 100 that are run by women. The female CEOs interviewed say that while women executives have come a long way, they still face many challenges.

Cheryl Kek, president and chief operating officer of Datrose Industries, No. 15 on the Top 100, said the obstacles range from differences in leadership styles to differences in preferred topics for small talk. But the business challenges usually are gender-neutral, she said.

"Some of the challenges are the same challenges men face. Doing more with less, competition, globalization of the economy — these are the bigger challenges that we're all facing."

Sharon Napier, CEO of Partners + Napier, one of Rochester's leading advertising agencies, offers advice for up-and-coming female CEOs: "It's not as much about being a woman in business anymore as it is about being an effective and approachable leader."

At Language Intelligence's North Goodman Street office, White says the foundation of her company's success has been taking risks. She launched the company with her own money. She followed her passion for teaching.

"I actually didn't think of it, that I am starting a business and I am a woman. It was simply that I liked what I was doing. I had a passion for that.

"If I had been in a field that's very male-dominated, maybe it would have been different."

White has a clear mission for her company, which is to offer an a la carte selection of teaching methods for customers' varied needs. One method, for example, teaches primarily through dialogue with teachers.

The self-made CEO says she has learned a lot about business on the job. White concludes that the key to success is not related to gender. "I would say start with finding what is your passion, and then see if someone can use that as a service."