

Athena Award Finalist: Heidi Crum

CFO of 10 til 2 finds niche with part-time placement service

By Maria Cote

As she strolls from her family room toward a spacious kitchen, Heidi Crum pauses to gently pick up a framed photo of two adorable, grinning 9-year-old boys.

They are, she will tell you, part of the inspiration for 10 til 2, a long-term, part-time placement service she owns with two other women.

"I was in the same boat as so many other parents out there," says Crum, tucking a long strand of hair behind her ear. "I wanted time with my kids, but I wasn't happy being a stay-at-home mom. For some women, that works. It didn't for me."

Thus the business, which now has 19 franchises in nine states, was born. It was a group of four women, who met through mutual acquaintances, who started 10 til 2 in 2003; three are still equal business partners. Crum, who has a bachelor's degree in accounting, is the CEO.

"Mostly, it's moms who come to us, hoping to find a job with flexibility," says Crum, one of five women nominated for an Athena Award this year. "If she needs to pick the kids up after school, or get her child to the orthodontist's office, she can do that. I say 'moms,' but we also work with dads, and people who are retired but might need to supplement their income a bit."

The economy has had an effect on 10 til 2, the 39-year-old says.

"Not many people have the money to start a new franchise, so that's hurt us a little. But we are seeing a lot of businesses hoping to cut costs by finding ways to work more efficiently. If someone can get the job done in 25 hours instead of 40, all the better. And these part-time employees aren't getting benefits, so that saves a company, especially a small one, a lot."

Crum notes that 10 til 2 is seeing a lot of women who have to return to the work force because a spouse or partner lost a job, or took a pay cut.

"It's a great solution for a lot of people," she says. "We require only that an applicant have one year of college, though most of ours have a bachelor's degree."

Because of the care taken to place a client with the right company, often it's a fit that lasts for many years.

"We're really proud of the fact that we do so well," Crum says.

The other source of her pride, Crum says as she navigates around piles of Lego blocks, has inspired the work she does helping the community. The divorced mother has joint custody of her two sons, Cal and Quentin. Cal has cerebral palsy, and his parents' attempt to find a place where he could learn and be happy when he was young led her to the Sewall Child Development Center, which serves special-needs kids.

"The center is truly wonderful," says Crum, who sits on the board of directors. "I wanted to find a place where he could learn and fit in, a place where I could be involved."

She's also proud of her work for the Starfish One-by-One program, a nonprofit organization that helps young girls in Guatemala.

"I traveled there recently, and it's an experience that's hard to describe," says Crum, who adds that her parents, who were missionaries, most likely inspired her to reach out to those living in poverty.

"For a lot of these girls, the goal is to simply get them some education. They're often expected to work, to help their families. We want to teach them the value of learning, and hope to improve their self-esteem."

Jodi Olin, sales officer of 10 til 2, nominated her co-worker for the award.

"What's amazing about Heidi is that she's an amazing business woman, but she's so gentle in her demeanor," Olin says. "She has savvy and expects a lot out of people, but she's not hard-hearted at all. In fact, she has the most giving personality I've ever encountered."

