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Focus on the future presents opportunities for Reynolds

BY STEPHEN ROTH | STAFF WRITER

Margaret Reynolds describes herself as a forward-thinker.

"In tackling challenges in business, and even in life day to day, I think of how we can have a better tomorrow," she said.

That futuristic approach fueled a 20-year career at Hallmark Cards Inc. in which Reynolds rose to a lead strategist position for the greeting card giant. It helped her launch Reynolds Consulting LLC, which dispenses strategic advice to growing companies, such as Union Bank and Sceptor Industries, Inc.

That optimism also has been an energizing force for her bustling family. Alison, the second of Reynolds' three children, has cerebral palsy.

"You have to have that can-do attitude because you're constantly faced with challenges that I think the average family doesn't have to deal with," Reynolds said.

Jeff Jernigan's introduction to Reynolds was an unsolicited letter she sent him shortly after forming her consulting company in 2001. The Union Bank CEO said he brought her in for an interview and was dazzled by Reynolds' ideas and marketing savvy. Today, she handles marketing and strategic planning duties for Union Bank, which is on pace to open at least one branch bank in the metro area every 18 months.

"She's a no-nonsense, professional businessperson with a huge amount of experience," Jernigan said. "She brings to us something I couldn't hire with the level of experience that she had from so many years at Hallmark."

So potent was Reynolds' strategic vision at Hallmark that she sometimes got frustrated with others who were less focused on future scenarios, said Steve Doyal, Hallmark's senior vice president of public affairs and communications. Fortunately, he said, Reynolds also had the charisma and patience to coax others in the direction she was headed.

"She was the first person to lay down the tracks in the snow, (and) she went over the ridge because she knew what was over there," Doyal said. "She had done much of what was the early work, so she was confident about what was over the horizon."

Much of what has shaped Reynolds'



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At Hallmark Cards, Margaret Reynolds "was the first person to lay down the tracks, (and) she went over the ridge because she knew what was over there."

life can be traced to her Lincoln, Neb., childhood. She met husband Rick Reynolds, the golf pro at Lakewood Country Club in Lee's Summit, when the two attended middle school. An early career influence was Reynolds' late mother, who rose from secretary to head of marketing for a Lincoln architectural firm and always told Reynolds and her two sisters that they could achieve anything they wanted.

A certain Kansas City greeting card company also made a childhood impression. Reynolds loved to go to the gift shop to buy wrapping paper and said

Hallmark always had the prettiest. As a business major at the University of Nebraska, she made contact with Hallmark recruiters, and landed a job with the company right out of college.

By the late 1990's, she was director of strategic development for all of Hallmark's brands and marketing channels in North America. She was a member of teams that developed the popular 99-cent card program and acquired The Picture People Inc., a company specializing in child and family photography, in 1999.

Reynolds said she thrived at

Margaret Reynolds

Title: President, Reynolds Consulting, LLC

Age: 47

Family: Husband, Rick; sons, Andrew, 21, and Riley, 15; daughter, Alison, 16

Education: Bachelor's degree in business and marketing, University of Nebraska

Hallmark, partly because she loved the company's products and sentiments.

"I have always believed you can be a better marketer when you truly are committed to and believe in the brands you're marketing," she said.

But in 2001, with Hallmark undergoing a reorganization, Reynolds decided to take a buy-out package and try something new. She said she thought that would be a strategic role with another corporation, but most companies weren't looking to hire someone with her experience in the recessionary days after 9/11. Those companies were willing to outsource project work, however, which led to Reynolds Consulting, a one-woman firm that does everything from brand development to marketing strategy.

Sceptor Industries, CEO Dick Jarman enlisted Reynolds' help when he formed his company three years ago. He credits her research and vision with helping the Kansas City chemical and biological safety company break into the government and indoor commercial markets.

"She just has an incredible mind," Jarman said. "This year, we were (Entrepreneur magazine's) 16th fastest-growing company in the United States, if you want some proof of the byproducts of her efforts."

A board member of Starlight theatre, Doyal attended a strategic planning retreat last year that Reynolds facilitated for the nonprofit. She was the same bright, challenging and wildly inquisitive woman who hashed out strategy for so many years at Hallmark, he said.

"She's more of a constructive builder than a negative influence," he said. "She's much more interested in considering the possibilities than she is the difficulties."

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