

Karen Dunning

Karen Dunning's success as a businesswoman is so evident that she is now officially retired at the age of 40. Now, Karen says it's time to do all the things she's always wanted to do, but never had time for. These activities include traveling, scuba diving, obtaining a pilot's license, helping with young girls programs, and various business opportunities now available to her.

Karen is used to standing up for herself and reaching for her dreams. She attributes much of these characteristics to her upbringing, specifically her mother's influence. When she was five years old, her father died and her mother was left with four small children to raise. Her mother went back to college and received her teaching certificate to support her family. "She instilled in me that I could do anything I wanted," Karen reflects. "And that you need to know how to take care of yourself; always be ready for the unexpected."

Karen always knew she'd have her own business someday. In high-school, when she was counseled to be a teacher, she instead followed a friend's advise and went into business finance in order to follow her own dreams: owning a bank. She graduated in December 1978 from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a bachelors of science in Business Administration with a concentration in Finance and a minor in Spanish.

Because she was a woman, she wasn't able to be hired as a loan officer at a bank, only as a teller or secretary. But Karen obviously had other plans and accepted a position with IBM as a systems engineer, installing computers at banks across the state. In three years, she switched to sales at IBM and continued to enhance her computer knowledge through learning various specialties in the industry.

In 1984, Karen bought into a computer supply company and went from selling \$200,000 computers to selling \$3 ribbons. The business did extremely well and immediately became a success.

Then in 1988, Karen started the business, Computer Essentials, selling computer electronic equipment, such as LCD panels and data video equipment. Again, the business kicked off and jumped right into success. "I have a natural talent in starting businesses," Karen says. "I can tell what a business needs to do to be a success." In 1991, she merged Computer Essentials with Business Media. "It was fun to be in the Midwest and to be such a big player in the industry," Karen says. She sold her share on August 7, 1997.

Still adjusting to life without business, Karen has already picked certain areas she wants to focus some attention to in her new found "free time." She plans on focusing a lot of her

attention now to helping young girls get the support and encouragement she had from her mother to be whatever you want to be. She serves on the Lincoln-Lancaster County Women's Commission and founded the Karen Dunning Fund for Women's Studies endowment for the UNL Women's Studies Program. In 1995, Karen served on Governor Nelson's CEO Roundtable Conference as the small business representative, and in 1996, she received the Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the College of Business Administration at UNL.