

Earl and Snider are team at work, at home

BETS Consulting founders make time for family, community

By John Wolcott, Snohomish County Business Journal Editor

On their nearly identical blue-and-white business cards, Travis Snider and Barbara Earl each carry the title of president of their Mill Creek company, BETS Consulting.

That's the way they wanted it.

But, it's no problem, even though each has separate clients as well as joint ones, because this husband-and-wife team works so well together.

In fact, working well together is one of their trademarks. They enjoy each other's company, enjoy trading thoughts, ideas and business concepts as they work through the needs of their clients and — of course — they go to meetings, both separately and together. Many meetings.

Those who know them are well aware of how hard it is to go to any significant gathering of business people in Snohomish County and not see Barbara or Travis — or both — there. They seem to be everywhere, maintaining and enhancing relationships they've developed over the years, relationships that have created friendships as well as clients for them.

They're public about their community lives and private almost to shyness about their private lives. To those in the business world, their reputations are sterling. To their family, their traditions and roles are endearing and treasured.

All of their community involvement, business leadership, creative thinking, family values and deep-rooted links to the county make them two of the area's real VIPs — Very Interesting People.

As a seasoned consultant, Barbara helps businesses, government agencies and nonprofit groups improve what they do, working with them on marketing, creating their business' identity in the community, helping them with business policies and planning for growth. She doesn't make decisions for them, she guides them with information and sound advice.

At one time a senior project manager for Verizon Northwest and later vice president of public relations for Stevens Hospital, she has put her marketing management education



Snohomish County Business Journal/
JOHN WOLCOTT

"We communicate easily and have a great personal and business relationship," said Barbara Earl, about her husband and business partner, Travis Snider.

from Antioch University and her life experiences to good use, both for herself and the businesses she counsels.

“Barb spent four years commuting to Dallas for her work with Verizon’s forerunner, GTE Northwest,” Travis said. “Then she took early retirement to go to Stevens for a while, but then we started talking about what we wanted to do with the rest of our lives. About that time, I was planning my own retirement. We’d had a lot of opportunities and good fortune, and we both agreed one of the critical things for us was to stay involved in our community.”

“I had learned so much from my chamber and community work about how to motivate volunteers, how to get people to respond to your ideas. It was energizing to me,” Barbara said. “I worked with the Everett chamber and the General Hospital board, then with the South Snohomish County chamber and Lynnwood Rotary.”

In 2000, she began promoting her skills as an entrepreneur with BETS Associates (a name that was a melding of Barbara Earl and Travis Snider initials) so she could “gain control over my own time and have the flexibility to work with individuals and organizations I enjoy.”

A year ago, when she and Travis decided to re-brand their own business, they threw a summer “Re-Branding Party” for clients and friends to show off their new logo for BETS Consulting and talk about some new things they were doing, including Travis’ venture into executive coaching as well as business consulting, drawing on his earlier career as a CPA with Moss Adams, among other experiences.

“In creating our vision for the future, we wanted to continue our interest in filling significant roles in the community, through our business and our community service,” Barbara wrote in a letter to those she invited to the party. “There is much in life to be enjoyed and shared. Staying active and involved is essential for us. Helping others create and achieve their vision is what we do.”

On the backs of their business cards, they emphasize what they can do for their clients, but each card is different. Travis’ card notes that he “specializes in creating profit improvement strategies for local businesses” by growing revenues, improving profits, increasing company valuation and helping business owners find a balance between their business and personal lives.

The back of Barbara’s card promotes her specialty of “creating corporate citizenship strategies for organizations to increase their visibility in their community” through community outreach, building community trust, local government relations and strategic philanthropy.

A sampling of their approach to business and life includes some basic beliefs, such as “profit is not optional,” “your company is only part of your life,” “companies should

always be great places to work, with positive environments” and “each company is unique and deserves special attention.”

For more than 25 years, each of them developed the ability to share experience and knowledge in ways that benefit other people’s businesses and organizations as well as their own. They have learned to listen, observe and articulate the challenges, solutions and goals of a variety of businesses.

Travis not only has extensive experience in executive coaching (he’s a member of the International Coach Federation), financial management and business and strategic planning but also the ability to bring out the unique gifts of others to improve their lives as well as their businesses.

“He’s also the 2005 recipient of the Everett Area Chamber of Commerce’s Henry M. Jackson award for community service,” Barbara said.

“But in 2003, Barb won the John Fluke award from the South Snohomish County Chamber of Commerce,” Travis interjected, openly amused that each has won the top award for community involvement and leadership from the county’s two largest chambers of commerce. “I’m not sure there’s another couple that has been honored with that.”

In 2001, he became president of the Snohomish County Facilities District, helping to guide distribution of \$25 million in sales tax funds into projects that are energizing the county. Among them are the Everett Events Center, the Future of Flight Center and Boeing Tour facility in Mukilteo, the Lynnwood Convention Center and the Edmonds Performing Arts Center, now under development.

“All of this is a lot of hard work, but it’s really fun, too,” Travis said. “I recall one client we worked with who had some fairly significant breakthroughs. We looked at their numbers and found they had a 26 percent increase in revenues and a 54 percent increase in net income. ... They went on to double the size of their business in less than five years.”

A committed volunteer — “it’s a way of life for me” — Barbara reserves 10 to 20 hours in an already full week of meetings, paperwork and client guidance to handle her volunteer responsibilities. She heads fund-raising campaigns, recruits volunteers and chairs committees. She also balances leadership roles with the South Snohomish County Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club of Lynnwood, Leadership Snohomish County, Volunteers of America and other groups.

“People tease us about how we can work side by side at our home office computers for hours at a time without talking. We have the same tastes in food, the same beliefs, the same temperaments, so it’s very easy to work and meet with so many different people,” Barbara said. “We communicate easily and have a great personal and business relationship.”

Travis said the two of them share a lot of what they observe in the business communities of the county, especially when they happen to go to different meetings or gatherings. They find it keeps both of them up to date on events and people in their lives.

“We kiddingly call ourselves ‘watchers’ sometimes,” Barbara said. “We’re also watching out for our clients’ interests as we travel and visit.”

Married for 20 years, the couple’s blended family is important to them, so important that they draw a tight line between their public and private lives, wanting to keep their lives with their “great family,” as they like to call them — their five children and five grandchildren — out of the public spotlight they themselves are so used to sharing.

“We have a great family, and we have great times together, going places, having family discussions, helping them to be computer literate for this era and sharing experiences. We don’t give gifts on the usual occasions. But we save for surprise trips for the whole family, such as the cruise from Seattle to Victoria one weekend, and sailing up the Campbell River and then being back by Monday morning,” Travis said.

“We’re also both avid readers, which is part of our deep belief in practicing lifelong learning. We also love European travel,” Barbara said, “which is why we have a long list of places we love to visit. Italy is at the top of the list. We love to see the art and architecture and learn the history as well as interacting with the people in different countries. We travel to interact as well as see and do things. Paris was wonderful. You hear the French don’t like Americans. We’ve been there several times and found them so friendly and nice.”

Mild-mannered, friendly and always willing to help out where they can, often in nonpaying roles, Barbara and Travis remember people, show genuine concern about others and do an admirable job of treating everyone fairly. They are people who like people, which is no doubt why they’re in a people business.

To get in touch with them, visit their Web site, www.BETSconsulting.com, or call 425-338-9667 for Barbara or 425-337-3333 for Travis.

Reprinted by permission of the Snohomish County Business Journal