

HER MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

A Dynamic Duo changes the face of airport concessions

By Wilma Ann Anderson

They've been described as the dynamic duo, and though their capes and utility belts look more like retail and food shops, the mother-daughter team of Lou Ella Jordan and Tarra Pressey still make a difference in south Florida communities under the moniker of ... (insert the clarion call of trumpets playing) Tarra Enterprises! They truly are super heroines to many, especially in the concessions industry.

The first incarnation of the partnership evolved from Lou Ella honing her retail skills during high school while working in a local grocery store. Later, after marrying and having Tarra, an opportunity to purchase a grocery store presented itself and Riviera Beach's Tarra Grocery was born. When Tarra was of age, she began working in her mother's grocery store and continued to do so during and after college. Meanwhile, Lou Ella partnered with a friend to form JL Unlimited partnership. Through an initiative by the Federal Aviation Administration, minorities in Palm Beach were encouraged to participate in a competitive bid for retail space in Palm Beach International Airport. In 1984 JL Unlimited won the right to operate a gift shop there. It was the first black business of any kind in Palm Beach International Airport.

For Lou Ella, the transition from grocery store to retail shop was easy; there were essentially the same records to keep, same reporting to government, same stellar customer service to give. After graduating from Tuskegee Institute with a degree in Finance, Tarra helped JL Unlimited establish a concessions shop in Atlanta's airport under the name of the Magnolia Group. In 1998 Tarra founded Tarra Enterprises. Her company, partnered with Hudson Group and NewsLink Group, LLC (the three companies jointly operating as AMS South Florida), was recently awarded a major seven-year contract. As the majority investing partner, Tarra Enterprises owns and manages 15 restaurants at Palm Beach International Airport and all of the retail businesses in Terminals 1 and 2 of the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

Tarra is excited about this strategic partnership because it means that trusted name brands will be offered. "People want to shop where they are familiar," Tarra says. "They purchase more of what they know." CNN Newsstand, Hudson News, and Newslink Ft. Lauderdale each bring a strength to the news/gift arm of the project. Specialty



retail shops include Discovery Channel Airport Store, KidsWorks, Life is Good and Sunglass Hut. This name reconnection has been very beneficial in lengthening Tarra Enterprises' reach.

In addition to seeking to collaborate with other minority businesses on her projects, Tarra makes sure her business participates in community activities. In fact, in 1997 Tarra founded Girls II WOMEN, a non-profit organization designed to educate, inspire and motivate underserved girls to enhance their self-esteem and succeed in life. Girls II WOMEN also provides important experiences for girls. They attend operas, fine restaurants, receive etiquette training, and are exposed to different career paths. Tarra's mother had always touted education as the main component in success. Tarra wanted to pass on some of these values to girls who may not have had a mentor like her mother.

The mother-daughter team raves that working together is a great opportunity; the trust and support is a huge asset to the success of their business. Lou Ella taught Tarra everything she knows, and Lou Ella says every decision Tarra makes, she also would make; they're always on the same page. "It's a huge asset to have someone who knows the business...someone to bounce ideas off of. ...someone like Lou Ella from the first generation of the business," Tarra says, beaming. These days Lou Ella takes more of an advisory role. Jokingly, she says her role consists of a couple of key questions and statements: "How much money did we make? How much do I get? Good. Now go make some more!"

Some of that hard-earned money is spent on fine dining, season tickets to Miami Heat games, visiting beaches and traveling together. They've turned business trips to Las Vegas into leisure getaways, experienced the homeland via South Africa, and explored Paris. As a teenager Tarra went to Europe and, though mom had the chance to go, she did not. They are catching up on missed adventures; next in line is a Mediterranean cruise.

Tarra especially loves helping young people. "The input in their lives impacts them in such a positive way and the effect transcends generations," she says. Tarra adds: "I want to be worthy of blessings I have received. What's the point of being here if it doesn't make a difference." Cheers.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

An airline executive who believes in serving a diverse market

By Wilma Ann Anderson

Monisa Cline met her destiny right on the campus of the University of Florida. Eastern Airlines courted her at college and, upon graduation, she joined its sales force. Soon after, Eastern's sales force joined with that of Continental Airlines; Monisa has been with Continental ever since.

As a young girl growing up in a bi-racial household, Monisa was intrigued by different cultures and far-away lands. It's no wonder that while studying marketing and business as an undergraduate, she was wooed by the travel industry. Traveling, meeting new people, business, and sales make her heart beat faster and has kept her at Continental for over 20 years. She is now staff Vice President, North America Sales.

While Monisa has been climbing the corporate ladder, she's seen Continental honor its mission to lead the industry from the inside out; Continental is known for being a multicultural company and goes out of its way to serve multicultural customers. Monisa has a hand in leading the team that ensures diversity is served. Her team includes Deidre Fontaine, Director of Sales Development, who has raised the awareness in the marketplace that Continental recognizes diversity as a strength and who has the airline involved in all kinds of outreach programs.

One initiative the team is especially proud of is its involvement in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Foundation in 2006 and 2007 as a sponsor of the Memorial Dinner and the Kids for King contest. Air travel for 50 kids and their parents to Washington, D.C. for the MLK Groundbreaking was provided. As an advocate for diversity, Continental has increased focus on women's organizations, and partnered with *Black Enterprise* and the National Black MBA Association, to name a few.

Monisa proudly says, "We're a multicultural company and we want to be upfront representing the market we serve." Monisa's department launched a global sales exchange program where sales managers from the U.S. train overseas. The outcome is professional growth, increased awareness about the importance of diversity, and first-hand knowledge of international culture. In addition, Continental is the founding corporate sponsor for the Houston chapter of Dress for Success, an organization that helps low-income women transition into the workforce.

Monisa sites working with great colleagues as her motivation to make a difference. In fact, these very same colleagues might say that during her tenure the sales team is increasingly high-energy, motivated and excited about the company and products. This excitement easily translates to customers who respond positively. Continental still serves meals at mealtime and offers a warm blanket. The fact that this airline has increased efficiencies in other areas, allowing it to maintain valuable services without increasing prices, has positioned Continental as a top-choice carrier. In 2007, Continental was the first airlines sales team to be awarded the distinction of Certified Travel Experts by the National Business Travel Association (NBTA). "This accolade demonstrates to customers that we've gone to great extents to see their perspectives," Monisa says. Though buyers for large corporations are mostly the ones who would revere this award, the average customer can be assured that Continental's service ethic trickles down.

For this busy airline executive, her favorite place to relax is Hawaii. She's also done South America and Asia and aspires to experience Russia, an African safari and Antarctica. These are not run-of-the-mill destinations. They are ones that, in their names alone, imply challenge. Well, Monisa's always up for challenges.



BEVERLY MEEKS

General Manager, Alliance Sales Development & Performance Consulting, Global Sales & Distribution
Delta Air Lines

Many of us look at a new set of golf clubs, or a pair of designer shoes, and say, "That's got my name written all over it!" Well, Beverly Meeks can top that. She has an *airplane* with her name on it! This came about when she was selected as a Delta Air Lines Chairman's Club honoree; only 100 employees per year out of 47,000 worldwide earn this leadership distinction. Beverly has been the first African-American female in many of her positions, and she was selected from a worldwide pool as one of two recipients of Delta's "2007 Miracle Maker Award" because of her community service. Beverly mentors girls through Teens Conquering Challenges, a non-profit she founded to help socially and economically challenged teens succeed.

Beverly is always bubbling with excitement, exuding a positive and encouraging attitude. This energy permeates every aspect of her job. She manages products and promotions that will enhance SkyTeam's brand and visibility across its 10 carriers and its 744 destinations. As performance consultant, she motivates and trains team members to ensure that their performance is always improving. —**Wilma Ann Anderson**



LILLIAN DUKES

Vice President of Technical Services
American Eagle Airlines

Lillian Dukes got into the airlines industry by accident. She doesn't have a romantic story about loving airplanes. American Airlines was the largest employer in Tulsa and Lillian needed work. With software testing experience from General Electric and a fresh master's degree in electrical engineering in hand, Lillian began her journey with AA.

Various leadership positions in Purchasing, Inventory Control and Engineering led to her current position overseeing the publishing of technical documents, managing aircraft mechanics and managing departments that analyze aircraft performance. Lillian is passionate about bringing change without destruction. She is a stickler for efficient processes, but she's far from a taskmaster. Many would be surprised to know that she most values the personal connections she's made. Her leadership legacy includes respect from employees, and the compassion to remember details of intimate conversations.

When she's not taking a swim at the beach, she's busy fusing humanity and spirit with the steel world around her. —**Wilma Ann Anderson**