



Siouxland

SIOUXLAND'S PREMIER COMMUNITY & LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

2012 "10 Under 40"

By Susan Fey, Photos by Megan Meyer

A few years ago, our team at *Siouxland Magazine* started rolling around the idea of recognizing young professionals under the age of 40 in our community, much like they do in other cities. These people would be not only great leaders and business professionals in the community, but also making strong, visible impacts through their community service work. These are people of great character and integrity, true visionaries; they have had the ability to make things happen in Siouxland, even when facing personal or societal adversity.

So, this year we implemented the plan. It evolved through a great deal of planning, meeting with community leaders and the Sioux City Growth Organization (SCGO) Board of Directors for feedback on how to best run the competition; it has involved detailed organization and a great deal of time. But, it was worth every moment.

In early spring, *Siouxland Magazine* put out the request for applications (due July 1) to organizations and businesses all over the Siouxland area. Four judges were asked to review the anonymous (names of nominees left off) applications and judge them with a rubric and score sheet.

Soon after the deadline of July 1, the judges were given a nearly 100 page packet to review. The response to our call was extremely impressive, and the task ahead of the judges was difficult. On July 11,

Karen Clark, Owner of Thorpe and Company Jewelers, Tracy Erlandson, Marketing Director at the Sioux City Symphony (and also a Board member from SCGO), Regis Garvey, Development Coordinator at the Sioux City Art Center, and Greg Jones, Sioux City's Chief Public Defender, came together to select 10 winners.

Their decisions were based on the applicants having high marks in the following areas:

- Vision and Leadership
- Innovation and Achievement
- Impact
- Growth/Development Strategy
- Community Involvement/Contribution

Five hours later, the judges agreed unanimously on the 10 winners.

The process was difficult because the applications were very diverse and strong; we would like to thank all of our competitors and their nominators for submitting applications. However, the 10 who were chosen are truly outstanding individuals and their applications stood apart from the rest. *Siouxland Magazine* and the "10 Under 40" judges commend these individuals for their exceptional work in the Siouxland community. We cannot wait to see your continued work in the future. Congratulations!

"10 Under 40" judges discuss scores for applicants on July 11.



Mary Sterk

Age: 39

Certified Financial Planner (CFP) & Owner; Sterk Financial Services, Inc - Dakota Dunes, SD



I think Siouxland can recruit and retain young professionals in a variety of ways. I believe that people respond in their work world to 3 major things – the ability to make good money, the ability to have enough time off to spend with their family or to pursue their personal hobbies, and the ability to grow and achieve greater career success. If the employers in the area can focus on these three building blocks as a fundamental strategy for recruiting new talent to the area, and growing the organic talent already here – I think we can hit a home run.

Mary Sterk, owner of Sterk Financial Services in Dakota Dunes, has a story that can inspire any young person looking to succeed in life. From a young age, Sterk faced adversity. “I was the teenage mother. I was the youth that desperately needed help. I was the one struggling to provide a better life for my two small babies, when I was just a child myself. Because of that, I know what these young people face. I understand the hopelessness they can feel when their situations feel insurmountable.” With Sterk’s adversity came great motivation to move out of the situation, taking night and correspondence courses and eventually attained the Certified Financial Planner Designation, and now owns a very large, successful high-end financial planning firm in Siouxland.

The adversity that Sterk faced when young applies directly into her philanthropic efforts, “Because of my background, both the Women United Organization (which supports breaking the intergenerational cycles of abuse towards children and dependence on the public systems) and the WIT Foundation Board (which focuses on helping people build better lives through education) are outlets that I can give to which resound highly with the guiding principles that my own personal story has created within me....So my advice to anyone who wishes to become more involved in the community is to simply look inside, see what resonates with you, and then seek out opportunities to connect with that in mind.” Sterk currently sits on the following boards in Siouxland: Sioux City Art Center, WITCC Foundation Board, and Women United Executive Committee Board. Most recently, Sterk was appointed to the Siouxland Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, which will commence in October of this year.

Sterk’s firm is becoming one of the largest Certified Financial Planning Firms in Western Iowa. She has sat on the mostly male-dominated spot as a long-time member of the Million Dollar Round Table, and has qualified multiple times for the prestigious Top of the Table and Court of the Table spots. In 2006, Sterk was winner of the Lewis and Clark Explorer Award – a national honor bestowed to a financial advisor who has demonstrated tremendous business success and growth, and provided excellent client care and service in the financial planning industry. Equally impressive, she also was recognized as one of the “50 Most Distinguished Women in Wealth Management.” Locally, Sterk was recognized in 2011 for her contributions and personal success in overcoming life’s challenges as recipient of The Siouxland Women of Excellence Award for Women Taking Risks.

Sterk has completed five acquisitions of other financial planning firms around the country becoming an industry specialist in this arena; she has even published a book: *Buy It! The Practical Guide to Buying a Financial Services Practice*. Sterk also runs a coaching business for other financial advisors to learn how to run their firms more effectively, and she also developed and taught a class at a local college entitled “Financial Planning for Women.” On a fun side note, Sterk also has her pilot’s license and flies her little Piper Cherokee 235 to meet with her clients who are outside the Northwest Iowa region.

Sterk’s story of moving from Welfare to Wealth Management is extremely inspiring, as is her effort to give back to the community that helped her, “I would like to take that a step further and say that my additional hope is for those who have succeeded to focus on paying it forward. No one got where they are today entirely on their own. Paying it forward keeps the cycle of prosperity and growth moving forward.”