

Local business women earns recognition

By Erika Fricke

Staff writer

Barbara Van Kirk remembers the beginning of her company, IQ Personnel in Murrysville as a case study in divine intervention.

She had quit her job as a consultant and was working on a business plan and employee manual, while spending time involved with her children's activities.

"I'm taking my good old time," she says.

Then she got two calls: a man from Colorado Springs looking for employment and a company looking for a contract employee. Two months later she had a company that places consultants with companies needing computer solutions.

Van Kirk is a recipient of this year's Best 50 Women in Business Award, sponsored by the commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Economic Development.

The employees who nominated her for the award say her skill as an employer is knowing how to treat the people who work for her and get the best out of them.

She's had lots of practice being an employee.

Van Kirk started working when she was 18, and never stopped until the brief period



Barbara Van Kirk

before she started her company. She was one of 13 children, and her father couldn't afford to send her to college.

Instead a high school career counselor sent her to a job fair where Westinghouse hired her in its nuclear department right out of high school.

She had her brief period without a job when she realized she wanted to spend more time with her family and didn't want to be out of the house so often.

"It was time to focus on the family," she says. "I didn't want my kids to remember me dashing out the door at 8 a.m. and getting back at 7 p.m."

She realized many women didn't want to work 40 hours a week outside the home and found a way to match employees needs with flexible employers in need of computer engineers. The

majority of IQ employees telecommute.

"I'm the queen of flex," she says, smacking her desk.

"For most people it's not the 40 hours, it's how they spend it. If you have your most productive time from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m., who am I to say that's not OK."

Although 11 of IQ's 25 consultants are women, a disproportionately high number compared to the amount of women in the computer engineering business, Van Kirk says her company doesn't just appeal to women.

"Men want to be just as flexible as women," she says.

"I think the important thing is being able to balance personal and professional. To walk away and say 'I did a good job and still have time for family.'"

Employees say one of the best parts of working for IQ is the personal attention.

"Every year she throws a Christmas party, and she buys every child of every family in the company a present," says Paul Lusardi, that first consultant from Colorado Springs.

He also remembers when he got his first paycheck, Van Kirk brought it to his work place in person.

"She was as happy as I was," he says.