

Telecommuting takes on new meaning of local firm

By Bryna Zumer

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If you call the office of local public relations company IMPACT and speak with founder Carolyn West-Price Touhey, you would probably assume she is speaking from the firm's Columbia office.

The reality, however, is thanks to modern technology, you might never realize Touhey is actually running her company from 3,000 miles away on Canada's Vancouver Island.

The Howard County native and businesswoman has been running IMPACT, which helps market locally owned small- and mid-size businesses such as The Melting Pot in Columbia, Let's Eat in Ellicott City and Gallery 44 on Route 40 in Ellicott City, out of Vancouver Island for about two years.

Her plans to emigrate from the United States began when she found herself with a few extra days on her hands during a 2004 seminar in Canada.

She decided to drop by the scenic, 285-mile island just north of Washington state along with her husband, Steve, and discovered it was love at first sight.

"We were told we would love it, and we did," she said.

After several more trips to ensure it was not just "island lust," the couple made the decision to move to Canada.

"I called my dad in Laurel and said, 'I just bought 12 acres in paradise.'"

Facing adversity

Touhey grew up just south of Columbia, graduated from Hammond High School and then Loyola College. She continued to teach marketing at Loyola and Johns Hopkins University, where she became close friends with student Duane Carey, who would later become her company's president when she left for Canada.

Her personal life took a turn for the worse in recent years, with the death of her mother in 1997, her first husband in 2000 and her father in 2005. Her work kept her going, she said, through the chal-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Carolyn West-Price Touhey, left, and her husband, Steve, moved to Canada two years ago and still runs her Howard County firm.

lenge of being a widow at 35.

"The business kept me focused and rooted. I just knew I had to take one hour at a time, one moment at a time. ... I really could not wallow in self-pity very long," said Touhey, who remarried in 2001.

While working on construction of her new Canadian home, Touhey continued running the Howard County firm and also began work on a bed-and-breakfast.

"We thought this was a perfect place to open a B&B, so we could share paradise with everyone else," she said. "I have always wanted to own a bed-and-breakfast but, being a marketing professional, you do what you are trained to do."

Carey, a Pennsylvania native who is now manning the Columbia office, said he believes the sudden deaths in Touhey's family made her more willing to seize the day and pursue her goal of living in Vancouver.

"This is a pretty drastic thing to do. I do not think she would have done it if she had not had to deal with her husband dying, if she had not had a life-changing moment."

Despite escaping the traffic and growing development in Howard County, Touhey said she still admires the "grassroots" way people conduct business here.

"Even in spite of its growth, it is still very much a close-knit community in the business world. I always felt like there was a place for a small business in Howard County."

Unlike Baltimore County, which feels more "formal," Touhey said Howard felt more friendly.

"Everyone seems open to helping the new guy because they were new at one point," she said, adding, "I always felt kind of funny that I was a native."

Carey said the transition of dealing with Touhey's absence has been fairly seamless thanks to the phone and Internet.

Ultimately, Touhey thanks technical innovation for her ability to run a company in Howard County while simultaneously living out her dream abroad.

"It is really cool that I can service clients and keep business running as-is because of technology, and take on new business," she said.