

Creative Computing

Profession's Advancements Renew Entrepreneur's Interest
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WEST HARTFORD -- Day after day, the numbers floated across her computer screen, an endless string of ones and zeroes - computer programming code - 00001000001111 ...



"I didn't like programming," said Eileen Hasson, 41. "I got so bored - the bits, the bytes."

At the time, the mid-1980s, Hasson was one of a handful of women pursuing a computer science degree at the State University of New York at Albany.

Despite her ennui, Hasson persisted. "My mother pushed me. She was just a housewife, but she wanted me to get into computer technology," she said.

After graduating in 1987 with degrees in computer science and communications, Hasson went to work as an office manager for Taiyo Life Insurance Co. in New York City.

Although her job involved working with computers, it did not entail creating lines of code. She left that task to the Lone Rangers of the computer world, the hard-core programmers who enjoy toiling in front of a screen. Two years later, she moved to West Hartford and operated a direct-mail franchise company.

After nearly 10 years in exile, Hasson decided it was time to return to the world of computers, which by then was vastly different from the one she'd studied as an undergraduate.

"That's when it got exciting. The Internet was graphical. When I was in college, everything was line coding. Now it's user-friendly," Hasson said.

In 1996, that change prompted Hasson and her husband, Matthew, a computer programmer, to launch The Computer Co. Inc. with \$100,000 in personal savings. In 1998, they hired their first employee. Today, the West Hartford-based business offers a full range of computer services.

The company has grown from one employee to 21, and next month, the Hassons plan to move to a 9,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art data center in Cromwell, more than doubling their space. There they found appropriate and affordable land.

"We're constructing our own building," Eileen Hasson said. "We're centrally located, right off Interstate 91 and near Route 9. We're smack in the middle of the state."

Last year The Computer Co. "earned a couple million dollars in revenues," she said, declining to divulge specific figures.

Eileen Hasson, the company's president, and Matthew Hasson, 43, its vice president, describe their firm as a one-stop shop. "We do programming, web design, networking and data center services, including data recovery," Eileen Hasson said.

Although the demand for hard-core programmers continues, the demand for another kind of technician has also increased - the person who can make people feel comfortable as they reach for mouse or keyboard, she said. Creating that comfort level requires people who have a combination of technological and people skills - what Eileen Hasson refers to as "bedside manner."

The Computer Co.'s clients include Better Bedding, an East Hartford-based bedding retailer; CowParade, an international provider of art displays; and the Fairfield County Medical Association and the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford.

Hasson marvels at how far technology has advanced from her college days.

"If I were in school today, I'm sure I would love it," she said.
"Technology is more analytical, more graphical, more creative."

Now she hopes to communicate that excitement to the leagues of young girls and women who shy away from science and technology. When Hasson recently advertised for an information technology specialist, she received 300 resumes. Only one was from a woman.

With experience and training, the position can pay as much as six figures. And at her company, it's a 9-to-5 job, said Hasson, who, as the mother of two young boys, understands that women are often asked to balance career and family.

In 2005, Hasson won a Women of Innovation Award from the Connecticut Technology Council. Now in its third year, the program honors the accomplishments of women in academia, research and technology, said Michael Scricca, the council's director of membership.

"Eileen won because she was doing pro bono work for some not-for-profit companies in the Hartford area," Scricca said.

Impressed with the Women of Innovation program's mission, Hasson has volunteered for its steering committee for the past two years. The 19-member committee selects 50 finalists and eight winners. As a committee member, she hopes to encourage more women to pursue a degree in technology or computer science.

Gone are the days when computer technology was limited to writing code - the ones and zeroes that made her college days drag.

"I think it should be a requirement for high school and college students - you can't graduate without a computer class. That way, they can see for themselves that it can be exciting and creative," Hasson said.
"It's so critical to get women at a younger age."

And what's good for women is good for her company, she said.

Someday, Hasson said, she would like to thumb through a stack of resumes with at least 10 to 20 percent from women.

"It would give me some choices," she said.

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