

## Dori Molitor: Brands for Women



Photography by Jerry Currey

By Lynn Fisher

If you are looking for the corporate big shoulders when walking into the office of WatersMolitor in the crisp teal glass building off Minnesota Highway 394, you'll be very disappointed. Instead you'll find warmly colored walls with the brightly framed highlights of ad campaigns, past and present, focused on the lives of women.

Then there's Dori Molitor, 48, the marketing company's CEO, a woman whose wide smile and positive attitude nearly outshines her office's red walls and flowing floral curtains. Her friend, Judy Shields, describes her best, "Personally, Dori is a warm and gregarious individual who envelops you into her life with open arms."

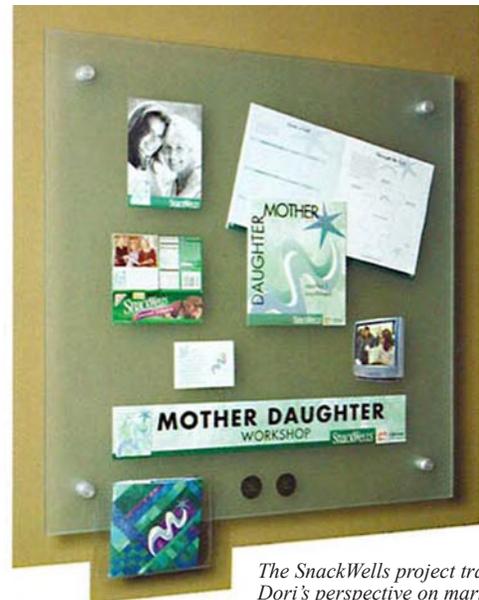
A woman who once dreamed of being the best secretary, this Rockville native from a farm family of 12 children now commands a roomful of executives as a national leader in marketing products to women.

### Special Niche

Since Dori and her husband, Todd Waters, founded WatersMolitor in 1988, the company has promoted such brands as Crayola and Gerber, as well as many other leading companies and organizations.

But their shift to branding expertise for women consumers didn't happen until WatersMolitor had celebrated 10 years in business and landed a project to do market research for SnackWells cookies and crackers. As part of the project, the team visited women in their homes, conducted mother/daughter workshops and created Mother's Day journals.

"The whole assignment made me stop and say, "Wow this is something that I really believe in," Dori says. "It came back to women, enriching women's lives, and I saw the merging of my personal passion with my business and was very excited about making that shift."



*The SnackWells project transformed Dori's perspective on marketing*

Some of their recent successes in branding to women have occurred with Serta, which is launching a new project based on the daytime benefits women want from their mattresses, and Old Home, whose new campaign resonates with busy women.

Dori has very specific ideas about who markets to women well. She says that the key to marketing is to make your product more relevant in a broader more meaningful way. Have an obsession to enrich the consumer's life.

She feels good about buying projects that go beyond traditional marketing. A company such as Dove, for example, is not only using models that look like real women, it also works with the Girl Scouts of America, funds self-esteem programs and advocates positive body images through schools.

Since starting the campaign, Dove has experienced double-digit growth, Dori adds. "If marketers can understand women and be more relevant in their lives and enrich their lives, women will support and buy their brand. So they win in the end and so will women," she says.



*WatersMolitor works with familiar brands like Old Home.*

### Small towns, Big ideas

Dori was the fifth child of nine girls and three boys, and the first to attend college in her family. She began school in a one-room-school house (District 168, the last in the state's history that closed in 1965) that her great-grandfather was instrumental in founding.

"No running water, an outdoor bathroom...the teacher would teach first grade while everyone did their homework, then switch to second grade, to third grade, and you kind of listened in on other classes. And I actually...truly...walked to school every day," she points out with pride.

"I loved school," adds Dori, who was graduated from Rocori High School. "I was in competitive speech and student council. My four older sisters all graduated at 18 and got married at 19. College wasn't really a consideration."

But to get her start on being the best secretary, Dori decided to attend St. Cloud Vocational School's nine-month secretarial degree program. After graduation, with little training in the fine art of the job search, Dori literally hit the pavement in downtown St. Cloud where Herberger's now stands.

"I walked down a long hall...and at the very end the last door on the right said Congressman R. Nolan. I remember Lorraine Skelton was working; she talked to me for a little bit and she said... 'Umm...you know we don't have a position here, but our campaign will be starting...Let me call Washington and talk to the campaign manager and see where we stand with hiring there.'"

What happened next was shocking for a small town girl whose family made long distance phone calls maybe twice a year. "She picked up the telephone and I thought, 'She's calling Washington D.C.'" Dori says. And then she was hired.

Dori worked for Congressman Nolan all through his re-election campaign as his office manager. When he was re-elected, she was asked to join the staff in Washington.

"I still remember today, being in the yard, getting in the car, my whole family standing in the yard saying goodbye...and I was scared to death," Dori says. "We took off driving...I cried all the way through Minnesota, all the way through Wisconsin, Illinois...I just cried and cried."

"It was hard to see her go, but exciting to see what she could accomplish," recalls Dori's mother, Eunice Molitor. "She was the first one who took off and went to the city...and she handled it well."

Three years later at age 22, Dori, still in Washington, had risen to full legislative assistant. Her greatest memory of that time was of attending the 1976 inaugural ball and dancing 10 feet away from President Jimmy Carter and Rosalind Carter. Her responsibilities at the time were women's issues and small business.

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## Women's median income has risen 63 percent while men's has stayed virtually steady (6 percent) over the past three decades.

—*New Strategist, 2004*

"I think that is really where part of my passion and interest for enriching women's lives came from," she says.

### Authentic

Dori returned home to Minnesota to both get her degree from the Carlson School of Management (from which she graduated summa cum laude) and to marry the man who she met during the campaign and had essentially waited for her all the while she worked in D.C. Now 25 years and two kids later, Todd Waters, who has gone on to other career pursuits, says that Dori has remained the same authentic person she was when he met her.

"She's the same with a Fortune 500 CEO or the girl that bags her groceries. Her success is inevitable; she has an empathic, intuitive understanding of women consumers," Todd adds.

Dori and Todd's daughter, Alexandra, a senior at Wayzata High School, says that her mother, "cares about women, and it is her goal that they may be understood and valued, even celebrated."

Her efforts extend to the community. For the past six years, Dori has volunteered with WomenVenture, a Twin Cities-based organization that helps women develop their careers and start businesses. She recently became a member of the board of directors, and is a strong example that a person can do anything when you put your heart and mind to it, according to Tene Wells, spokesperson.

"She's good at (what she does) because she's able to help focus the message on what will make an emotional connection to a female market," Wells says.

Speaking of connections, Dori still makes frequent trips to the St. Cloud area to speak about branding to women or to visit family members, including her parents who still live in Rockville. When asked if that's part of her work-life balance, Dori naturally reframed the question for a broader impact.

"To me, work and family are all integrated, and that's how you have the best and richest life. It's all part of the journey."

### Chief Purchasing Officers

Women are responsible for:

- 83 percent of all consumer purchases
- 80 percent of all health care
- 80 percent of do-it-yourself projects
- 68 percent of new cars
- 66 percent of computers
- 55 percent of consumer electronics
- 53 percent of investment decisions
- Handling 75 percent of all family finances
- Half...or more, of the household income in most U.S. households