

New Austin Software Council Chair Ready to Stir the Pot

By Emily Sopensky

► The Austin Software Council is alive with momentum. And if all goes well, Betty Otter-Nickerson, the ASC's new chair, will be the pinion upon which that momentum takes off.

Otter-Nickerson is one of those people who never bats an eye when taking on a job that would overwhelm most of us. She is a tiny woman with a large presence who takes everything in stride and accomplishes much without fanfare. Maybe it's because of her upbringing as an "Army brat," where developing new friends every few years was just part of life. Maybe it's because she started out her professional life as a social worker. Whatever the reason, the Austin Software Council (ASC) is betting she will fill an important role at a critical time.

In the last two years, membership in the council has more than doubled. It has changed its nonprofit status and weaned itself from the folds of academe to stand on its own. Also, when former executive director

Cerise Blair stepped down in January to take another opportunity, the ASC was forced to search for a new director and hone its own vision.

Outgoing ASC Chair Becky Taylor of Terrace Mountain Systems (www.tmountain.com) sensed that Otter-Nickerson might be interested in taking over the voluntary but crucial position.

Explains Otter-Nickerson, "I've been on the road for the last two years. While it's wonderful that my husband runs his consulting business from our home and my seven-and-a-half-year-old understands why Mommy is away a lot, it's time to get my eyes into the community." Fortunately, her employer, BMC Software, agrees with her.

Otter-Nickerson is vice president of research and development and Austin site manager for BMC Software (www.bmc.com), a Houston-based developer of enterprise-level solutions. The company's software is designed to support and improve the availability, performance, and recovery of critical applications and data in com-

plex computing environments. The 18-year-old firm opened offices in Austin in 1985.

Otter-Nickerson joined BMC



Betty Otter-Nickerson

over six years ago as site manager. At the time, there were 50 people working for BMC in Austin. Today, there are 500 BMC employees in Austin and the profitable company has 4,400 worldwide employees. This fast-paced growth is one of the reasons that Otter-Nickerson

decided to get involved with ASC.

"We're always recruiting," she explains. "Last year I had just gotten back from a business trip when I opened the paper to see a story about the ASC-UT Career Fair held the day before. That was the first I had heard about it. And I had missed it!" On her own, Otter-Nickerson had tried her luck working with the University of Texas on recruitment issues. Like many others before her, she discovered this was not an easy task. As a graduate of the university's MBA program, she figured she had an automatic "in." But UT was unresponsive to her, she says.

Otter-Nickerson immediately bore down and got involved in Austin Software Council University programs. Designed for busy high-level, high-tech executives, these programs are offered usually in seminar format. Typical of its offerings is

the recently launched "Software Startup 101." The course exposes students to five key areas for any software startup — marketing, legal, finance, human resources, and software development.

Steve Vandegrift, past ASC chair and an entrepreneur whose startup is Activerse Inc. (www.activerse.com), is pleased with the new chair. "[Betty] represents the next step up the ladder for ASC," says Vandegrift. "Both Becky [Taylor] and I run startups. Because Betty represents larger software companies, she also brings credibility to the table."

Otter-Nickerson knows that it is her responsibility as the new chair to identify and bring into the fold software companies that are not presently involved in ASC. She also wants to discover why some members have not renewed.

"I believe in equity relationships," Otter-Nickerson announces. "Not just giving and not getting. Instead of sitting on a plane, I want to focus my energies here in Austin and get more involved in the community."