

PROFILE

SUE MECKLENBURG:

Star of CSR: Seattle *By Ed Kromer*

Sue Mecklenburg (MBA 1992) could be a case study in networking. Or serendipity. Or both.

The woman who has converted Starbucks' famous social and environmental ethic into action—establishing programs for volunteering, gift matching, emergency relief and environmental management, as well as landmark sustainable procurement standards—took a circuitous route to the global coffee giant's SODO headquarters.

"I started off a long way from here," Mecklenburg says.

After graduating from Northwestern University, she began her career as a physical therapist, married, and eventually moved to Seattle when her husband, a physician, was recruited to the UW Medical Center by an 8 x 10 glossy of Mt. Rainier.

While raising their two children, Mecklenburg became involved with a number of non-profit social service organizations. Casual volunteering soon turned into board leadership. And before

long, she was starting an organization called KidsPlace to support urban children and families.

"But I got frustrated spending all my time raising money," she says. "I thought, there's got to be a better way to do social good."

An MBA would pave the way. Once her kids were in high school and college, Mecklenburg

began her graduate studies at the Business School, intent on putting her organizational skills and experience to work at a corporation with a social mission.

But an unexpected opportunity knocked midway through the MBA program. A group of faculty had drawn up plans for a program in environmental management, and approached Mecklenburg to lend her organizational expertise. "They said, 'If you do this we'll give you course credit,'" Mecklenburg recalls, laughing. "I said, 'This is a business school. If I do this, you'll pay me.'"

She was hired, for the cost of tuition. The Environmental Management Program launched in autumn 1992, and she continued as full-time director for several years. Then one day she presented the Program's strategic plan to a Business School advisory committee, which included a Starbucks executive who knew the company was seeking a director to lead its new environmental affairs department. The exec had a recruiter call Mecklenburg to see if she

could recommend anyone. When she realized they weren't looking for a student, Mecklenburg recommended herself.

She was hired, this time for more than the cost of tuition, a thrilling proposition. "Since we didn't really have a vision of how to do environmental affairs, I was able to put my entrepreneurial and creative skills to good use," she says, "and my MBA gave me business credibility, so that I didn't come across as just a tree-hugger."

After a few years launching environmental programs, Mecklenburg was asked to add community affairs to her portfolio. She helped develop the Starbucks Foundation, created the Caring Unites Partners (CUP) Fund to support employees during unexpected financial crises, and launched the Make Your Mark program, which matches employees' volunteer hours with cash, allowing the company to practice philanthropy that is locally meaningful and individually rewarding.

In the late 1990s, Mecklenburg's social and environmental work began to converge into what is now called "corporate social responsibility" (CSR)—a sustainable way of business that seeks to maximize the company's positive social, environmental and economic impact.

"We began getting very interested in how we source products," she says, "and our notion of CSR expanded from philanthropy to business operations."

After being named vice president for business practices in the corporate social responsibility department, Mecklenburg got to work forging partnerships with non-profit organizations like Conservation International, which led to Starbucks' signature act of good

corporate citizenship on a global scale. The Coffee and Farmer Equity (C.A.F.E.) Practices began with a pilot program in Mexico, where economics were driving farmers to clear-cut high forest canopy. "The idea was that if we could convince farmers to grow their coffee in the shade, which is the traditional, sustainable way, we'd preserve and extend the forest for animals and plants. But for them to grow in shade, yields would be lower. So there needed to be a market for it," she says. "We were that market."

The successful project extended to five more sites, but Mecklenburg and her partners realized it was not scalable to the millions of farmers around the globe that supply Starbucks. So they decided to create a set of rigorous environmental and social standards for growers who wished to sell exclusively to Starbucks at a premium price—the C.A.F.E. Practices. This year Starbucks will buy 150 million pounds of coffee—nearly half its annual purchase—under these guidelines.

Mecklenburg has recently expanded her purview to supply chain operations, specifically establishing sustainable procurement practices. This has taken her from the tea fields of India to the factories of China, translating the spirit of C.A.F.E. Practices into sustainable sourcing of key products sold by Starbucks.

Mecklenburg feels like a kid in a coffee shop. "I wanted to work for a company that does some social good," she says. "But never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd end up with a company like Starbucks that is values driven, but also so fast-growing and entrepreneurial."

"When we were small, most of my work was aspirational. But now we can really move people—even big companies. My position gives me an opportunity to leverage the power of this \$7 billion business and make change all over the world." ■

PROFILE

CLAUDIA CLEMENTE AND RENATO AGRELLA:

MBA is a Family Affair *By Andrea Bowers and Ed Kromer*

skills as a senior network analyst at Alaska Airlines, where she develops mid- and long-range strategic planning and market growth forecasts.

Now Renato is pursuing his own MBA goals in marketing and entrepreneurship after serving as primary caregiver, working with the Red Cross and studying for the GMAT while Claudia went to school. He's interested in economic development on a global scale and interned this past summer at Moneytree, Inc., developing a program to teach Latinos the fundamentals of sound personal finance.

Life has been admittedly crazy these past few years. Claudia and Renato's day planners are chockablock with overlapping activities and demands, and flexibility is a necessity for daily survival. But the payoffs are rich, and richly shared.

"The way an MBA teaches you to tackle problems is the way we are teaching Andrea to do it," says Renato. "Identify what you want to do, how you want to accomplish this and how to measure results. That's the way she does it now."

Case in point: when Andrea and some classmates wanted to start a campaign to raise money for supplies in their school's gymnasium, she drew up a persuasive PowerPoint presentation. "Her slides were so concise and so good," Renato says. "Now she does it all the time."

A stellar all-around student, Andrea says she wants to get an MBA someday, "in art." ■

It's Andrea Agrella's second tour of the Business School's MBA program. She has participated in classes and "TG" mixers, worked through homework problems, prepped for case competitions, and is getting pretty handy with PowerPoint and Excel.

She's eight.

Andrea is the bright daughter of Claudia Clemente (MBA 2005) and Renato Agrella, a second-year MBA student. For this close-knit family from Venezuela, the UW MBA program has been indistinguishable from life the past few years.

"Andrea has been learning right with us," Renato says.

Claudia began full-time graduate studies in business and industrial engineering at the UW when her daughter was four. She finished in two years. Today she leverages both