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Debbie Weaver owns largest court reporting firm in St. Louis

Owner and president, Taylor & Associates

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After Debbie Weaver completed her schooling in 1979, she became one of the five court reporters working for Ann Taylor at **Taylor & Associates**.

Weaver, 42, is now a partner and co-owner of Taylor & Associates, which contracts with 60 court reporters and employs 12 additional staff members. Revenue at the firm has increased by 20 percent annually in recent years.

Weaver bought the full-service court reporting firm from Taylor in 1985 when Taylor left the management of the firm to become a federal court reporter. In 1994, Kelly Willis joined Taylor as a partner at the firm.

In recent years, the partners have set a pattern of growth by acquisition. In 1998, they purchased Schroeder Reporting, a local court reporting firm. In November 1999, they acquired Associated Court Reporters, which operates offices in Jefferson City, Columbia and Rolla, Mo.

In May, Taylor & Associates became the largest court reporting firm in Missouri when the partners acquired Venezia Reporting & Video service and doubled the number of court reporters working for the firm.

Weaver and Willis also have expanded the scope of their services.

"One thing we're proud of is that we've made an investment in our facility and providing extra services to our clients," Weaver said. "We have in-house video conferencing available if attorneys need it, and we have three conference rooms on site that attorneys can use to do their depositions."

The company also provides closed captioning services at public events. They volunteered their services to provide the captioning for Pope John Paul II's visit to St. Louis in 1999.

"Kelly and I were on a business trip, and Kelly said, 'We need to caption the Pope when he comes.' So we called the archdiocese, and she said it was an answer to a prayer that we called because they were trying to find someone to do it," Weaver said.

"We brought together a team of six reporters. It was a pretty involved process, but to be so close to a world leader was amazing."

Taylor & Associates also provided captioning for the recent Eucharistic Congress in St. Louis and for Gov. Bob Holden's inauguration in Jefferson City.

The company is also an affiliate of Spherion, a temporary and permanent placing firm.

"That means we can network court reporting jobs with Spherion across the country," Weaver said.

Approximately five years ago, Weaver and Willis started a complementary company to Taylor & Associates -- Court Room Technology Consultants.

"We are trial consultants to attorneys and help them present their evidence in court using technology," Weaver said. "We scan exhibits, digitize videos and do multimedia presentations for them."

Weaver has constantly tried to keep her company and herself updated on technology's possible uses in the courtroom.

"Kelly and I are always looking for the newest technology," Weaver said. "The fact that we haven't sat still and just stayed the same may be part of why we've continued to grow. We continue to challenge ourselves on a daily basis."

"Our knowledge of technology has all come from hands-on learning," Weaver said. "I never took any courses on it or anything. It just comes from the desire to learn and to try. Whatever problem we've tackled, we've found a solution."

The partners have spoken about the ways they have successfully implemented technology into their work at a meeting of the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis.

Weaver is a member and a past board member of the Missouri Court Reporter's Association, a board member of the National Network of Reporting Companies and a member of the National Court Reporting Association, where she has spoken on the topic of marketing a firm on multiple occasions.

Weaver, who is a single mother of four children, also has led her firm into community involvement. Taylor & Associates volunteered its court reporting services for the high school mock trials, sponsored by the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis, held in 1999.

The firm also is involved in the Angel Tree program, which assists needy families during the holiday season. Taylor & Associates sponsors a family each year as well as volunteering their time at the annual Angel Tree Christmas party.

"Six years ago when I first got involved, I took my own kids to the party, and it was an eye opener for them to see the needs some of these families have," Weaver said. "It's a great way to help these families. It's just a neat, neat program."

Weaver sees herself continuing to expand and improve the services offered by Taylor & Associates for many years to come.

"This has been my life for so long, I can't imagine doing anything else," she said.

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