

DARLENE DAVIS, 38

Principal, Davis Associates

Darlene Davis, principal of Florissant-based accounting firm Davis Associates, doesn't mince words on her hopes for the future of her business.

"I'm predicting that this firm is going to grow into one of the most respected, small independent CPA firms in the region, and will become the CPA firm of choice for small business owners," said Davis, who's from University City.

She seems to be on the right track. Davis Associates started in 2000 and now serves about 90 small business clients. Her staff has grown from just herself to having two additional CPAs and two other accountants and one administrator. In 2004, she won a Financial Services Advocate award from the St. Louis office of the Small Business Administration. Her firm's revenue grew by more than 120 percent over the past year, she said, though she declined to provide specific amounts.

Before starting her own firm, she worked for about three years as an auditor for Rubin, Brown, Gornstein & Co., and spent about eight years working for Monsanto as an auditor and financial analyst. After that, she logged about two years as chief financial officer for St. Louis-based TLC Next Generation, which was a retailer for Southwestern Bell cellular.



BRIAN CASSIDY

EDUCATION: Bachelor's in business administration, Saint Louis University, 1989

FAMILY: Husband, Tyrone; children, Malcolm, Olivia and Elliott

MENTOR: Davis' great-grandmother, Margaret McLemore, 99, of Osceola, Ark.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION: Be more focused and a better manager and balancer of my business and family

Davis banks on her firm's success mainly because she's had a market long before she had her own business. "A lot of people kept coming to me, asking me to work on various accounting and tax-related projects," she said.

Marion Hayes III, president of BRK Electrical Contractors in St. Louis, has been Davis' client since he started his business in 2002. The company made a little more than \$2 million in revenue in the past year. Hayes said Davis has been instrumental to his success. Davis helped him incorporate his business, secure financing, and always offered "golden nuggets" of advice, he said. "I think she has high ethics. Strong attention to detail. Obviously personable. A real good advocate for small business."

Davis also serves as director of the finance committee of the St. Louis County workforce development board, and she's served as president of the Greenbelt, Maryland-based National Association of Black Accountants. Her firm also volunteers to help area churches with their taxes.

Despite the constant balancing act entailed, the rewards of filling a need in her community are worth the effort, she said. "What I do, I don't even consider it work. I'm having fun."

— Christie Smythe