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Standout supplier believes 'sky is limit'

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She says it wasn't intentional, but Mary Parker has built a career and a company by going where few women had.

In the 1970s, when she was a college student and young mother in her hometown of Grand Rapids, Mich., Parker took a job at a General Motors plant as one of the few female precision grinding operators.

Today, the transplanted Atlantan runs ALL(n)1 Security Services Inc., a rare African-American woman-owned security company.

She started the business in 2001 after leaving another security firm. Now, thanks to contracts with both private and public clients, the company claims more than 200 employees and revenues that Parker says will top \$10 million next year.

"It was not," Parker said, "a planned career." More a matter of pursuing opportunities as they presented themselves, she added.

Her path has proven a successful one, however. The Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council recently honored Parker with its Supplier of the Year Award, while the Atlanta Business League presented her with its Outstanding Achievement Woman of the Year Award.

"She's grown her company incredibly," said Stacey Key, president of the Council. "She's in a business that's heavily dominated by men, but she's got a strategic plan and she's working it."

George Logan, a longtime security industry executive and friend of Parker's, said being a woman in the male-driven industry wasn't easy two decades ago.

"I know a lot of doors were slammed in her face at first," he said. "She's gotten where she is through sheer determination."

ALL(n)1 provides services ranging from uniformed security guards who patrol construction sites, stores, corporations and other facilities, to access control, remote surveillance and alarm systems, to traffic control and employee background checks.

The firm has worked special events such as sports events and concerts, and done jobs for companies like Atlanta Gas Light and clients such as Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

"She thoroughly understands the security business. Sometimes she sees needs before we do," said Angela Holliday, equal business opportunity manager for the airport's planning and development program.

Holliday said that while contracts are set aside for both minority companies and female-owned businesses, Parker "earned her spot at the table."

Parker entered the industry as a security officer for an automotive company, largely out of necessity. She was facing a layoff and could get trained for an available security job.

"I absolutely loved it," said Parker, who enjoyed being the first point of contact for people who came to the company. She said she was given the nickname, "Officer Friendly."

Parker worked her way into a management position and began to study the security industry, determining that there were plenty of opportunities, but few minorities or women in key roles.

"I decided the sky was the limit," she said.

A demotion prompted her to quit her job and head to Atlanta, where she went to work in a security firm in 1992. Besides gaining further experience, she earned an online degree in criminology. In 2001, she decided to go out on her own. Now, at 56, she foresees continued growth, fueled by partnerships that she said could yield business in states beyond Georgia and the Southeast.

Parker no longer goes by "Officer Friendly," but, she said, she has a better handle.

"I've graduated," she said, "to The Security Lady."

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