

PATSY STUKE

Company: American Osage Consulting Inc.

Title: President and co-owner

Responsibilities: Project management, sales, overall management.

How she got started: Stuke had been in the environmental, health and safety consulting and training sector but thought she could better meet clients' needs by providing one consistent contact throughout a project. So when she was downsized, she and her husband began discussing starting a business.

"It's been very fulfilling for me because I've always just been kind of a take-charge person," Stuke said.

Guiding growth: They took the plunge in 2002, with Stuke as 86 percent owner. American Osage Consulting began with no clients but soon landed the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs as its first.

The company at least doubled revenue its first four years and has grown every year since. It currently has five employees.

"I highly endorse her," said Larry Seal, director of buildings and grounds for Kansas City Kansas Community College.

Since 2006, Stuke has provided services to check air quality in campus buildings. She's personable, knowledgeable, provides service as advertised and is good at distilling technical language into plain explanations, Seal said.

"Her service has always been timely and fair-priced, and she's a minority vendor — you've got the whole thing going on," he said.

A higher-education challenge: Stuke had to overcome her perception that she wasn't successful because she lacked a college degree, despite experience such as managing 60 people.

Entrepreneurship has helped. From time to time, she takes college courses to strengthen important skills, but she doesn't get hung up on the credential.

"I think you can always learn," Stuke said. "For me, the degree is not as important now as it once was for me to feel successful."

A police volunteer by night: Stuke is part of a team of volunteers that drives around Lenexa each fall to check streetlights. She also gives children tours of the police department and pulls illegal signs.

"I love that job," Stuke said. "We do a wide variety of things to really help the community ... keep their costs down."

In another volunteer role, Stuke mentors women who run small businesses, sharing her business processes to help them get off the ground.

