

## International Perspective, Local Impact: Doris Duan-Young

She is bright, articulate and loves her adopted country. The first company she started — she has three now — was based on a growing need she recognized for children and adults with behavioral, emotional and developmental disabilities here in Central Florida. Her latest endeavor on an international level has been supported by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs and former Orange County Mayor Richard Crotty.

Doris Duan-Young, born and raised in the People's Republic of China, wants to become the honorary consul for her native country here in her new country. She and her powerful supporters waged a campaign to make that happen, but ultimately, she says, the People's Republic of China does not have a program for the honorary position. Nevertheless, she is working as an untitled ambassador, bridging the cultural divide in an effort to bring together opportunities.

In May of 2010, former Mayor Crotty asked Doris to aid him with advance preparations for his official trip to China. Her excellent communication skills in both the English and Chinese languages were deemed invaluable in her role as personal ambassador for the Mayor. "I met with the officials in Shanghai and set up all the meetings. Unfortunately the [Mayor's] trip was cancelled. That was my first official mission trip to help bridge the two countries," she says.

As a member of the Orlando Mayor's International Advisory Committee, she was appointed by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer as an ambassador to the China Guilin International Tourism Exhibition (CGITE 2011), held in Orlando's sister city, Guilin, in south China. "The purpose of the trip was for trade,



economic growth, and also cultural exchange," she explains. She is also a founding member of the Orlando Area Committee on Foreign Relations and a member of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition International Advisory Committee, and facilitated the first meeting between the Mayor of Orlando and the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Chinese Embassy in April 2011.

It was always her dream to come to the United States. "In the early '90s, about 50 percent of the young people graduated from prestigious colleges in China and their goal was to come to the United States because that was the free country to be in," she says.

Although she holds citizenship here, there are still extremely strong ties to her native country. Her parents have moved here and are currently living with her. However, she has a sister who still lives in Shanghai and is coming to stay with the family this summer. Last year she spent 10 weeks in China.

"I really have a deep understanding, especially in the differences in communication. If you just have a translator, the meaning often gets lost in translation. I have a passion for this and feel like it is my calling. What I am doing is for a purpose — it's to be a bridge between the two peoples," she explains.

As for cultural misunderstandings, she says people get offended by cultural nuances they don't understand or because they are on guard. In general, she thinks Chinese people are very friendly, very genuine and very open. "But as a race we are not as warm and can be very reserved. Sometimes that can be misinterpreted," she adds.

She had never been to the U.S. before enrolling in graduate school here. "It was a brave move," she admits. "It was a culture shock when I first arrived. I made a lot of friends from many cultures and those friendships have lasted over 20 years. I'm a very open-minded person. It has taught me to really appreciate everything around me."

She and her husband were already married when they came to study at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. In 1995, she obtained a master's degree in behavior analysis and achieved National Board Certification as a behavior analyst in 1996. The weather and a job offer brought her to Florida in 1995.

"The weather in Shanghai is kind of similar to Orlando — it's a little colder.

Carbondale is about four hours south of Chicago and way too cold in the winter. I knew an alumni who had graduated a few years earlier in the same program and she hired me to come to Orlando. She knew my SIU background — at that time was rated No. 2 in the nation for the graduate programs. Before we graduated, we were all offered jobs,” she says.

In that first job she was involved with working in group homes. She soon began traveling around the state with her mentor. The days were filled with assessments and staff interviews, followed by nights of finishing the reports and paperwork in hotel rooms. She quickly earned a reputation as the “paperwork queen” because assessment reports were commonly returned in seven days, while Doris delivered them the next morning.

“It was hard work, but I learned a lot. I had the book knowledge and now I had the practical experience. Consultation is very different. It’s not a 9-to-5 doing the same thing every day. You go to a new environment, assess the situation and you move on. You learn something new every time,” she says.

Starting her first company after her employer filed for bankruptcy, the 26-year-old knew she did not want to work for anyone else. The timing was perfect. She knew her skills were strong and she had the ability to do it. She became a subcontractor locally for DCF (Florida Department of Children and Families) and two years later they discussed with her the heavy caseload coming in from the state and federal level. Because it was so difficult to staff and oversee the number of caseworkers needed, they asked her if she was interested in starting her own agency to do the hiring, training and work needed. She said yes and they signed a contract with her new company.

Fast forward to today and the company has 125 professionals in the field, working in

schools and group homes. There are 15 staff members in the office managing those 125. That first company, Behavioral Support Services Inc., provides behavioral analysis and environmental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment, with a psychiatrist coming in once a week to prescribe medication.

The second company, American Living Inc., started in 2001, provides residential care for mentally disabled children. According to



Doris in China with Dick Batchelor

Doris, there was no facility for them at the time so they were constantly being Baker-Acted into hospitals and facilities. They were heavily medicated and not being treated properly. “It was horrible,” Doris explains. “I decided to open an intensive behavior home. If a client was out of control or in crisis I wanted to be able to take them in and stabilize them.” In 2004 a second home was opened.

In 2008 Doris felt her life had reached a milestone and it was time to give back to the community, so she and her husband opened Milestone Social Services. It was established as a not-for-profit organization designed to work with children in the foster care system.

“Those poor kids go through life with so much baggage, so much on their shoulders. We can help them before they fall into the DJJ (Department of Juvenile Justice) system. They often end up on the streets as run-aways,” she says.

“It feels so good. It is very self-gratifying to see the difference you are making in these young kids’ lives. When you read a thick rap sheet, it’s very sad. Now we can help them with things — even going to their

proms,” she continues. Milestone also received a grant, with overwhelming support from the community, to assist foster children aging out of foster care with vocational training so they can succeed as young adults.

Doris and her husband, who works with her in the businesses handling all the IT and technical aspects, have a 5-year-old daughter, Serena, and a 2-year-old son, Norden. The family tries to keep some of the traditions alive by eating Chinese food at home and speaking the language (in two dialects).

Professional, passionate, focused and compassionate, Doris Duan-Young is *definitely* a woman to watch.