

# THE Mecklenburg TIMES

## FIFTY MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN 2011

*Meg McElwain*



**M**eg McElwain was raised in a traditional Deep Southern family whose roots reach back at least five generations in the small north Mississippi city of Grenada.

Like her parents, she earned a degree from the nearby University of Mississippi. Like her parents, she thought the farthest afield her career would take her was Memphis, Tenn., a 90-minute drive up Interstate 55. And that was a long shot.

"I never thought I would leave Mississippi," McElwain said.

She's now 13 years into a Charlotte

residency that's been a personal and professional success.

McElwain, 36, met her husband in Charlotte, had a son in Charlotte and founded her own advertising and public relations firm — Magnolia Marketing, a hat-tip to her native state — in Charlotte.

So what happened?

"I graduated from Ole Miss in 1998, and the girl who was my neighbor for my last two years was coming here for grad school at UNC Charlotte," she said. "She was looking for someone to come with

**Owner and president**

***Magnolia Marketing***

**Hometown:**

Grenada, Miss.

**Lives in:** Charlotte

**Family:** husband, Frank Lyttle Turner III; son, Frank, 2

**Education:** bachelor's degrees in radio and television and English, University of Mississippi

**If you could have chosen another career path, what would it have been?** professional singer and entertainer

**What's your favorite reality TV show and why?** "As a wife, mother and entrepreneur, I have very little time to watch television. When I do, my two Franks usually control the remote."

■ Continued on next page

# FIFTY MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN 2011

■ Continued from previous page

her, and she convinced me to take a road trip while she looked for an apartment.

"I was like, 'Wow, this place is really clean, the weather's great, there are lots of young people.' All the stories in the paper were about how downtown is booming again. I called my mother and said, 'I think I want to move to Charlotte.' She thought I had lost my mind."

The reaction may seem a bit extreme, in this era when cross-country relocating isn't unheard of. But Deep Southern families — especially in places like Grenada, population about 15,000 — tend to stay put, as their parents did.

"No one ever leaves," McElwain said.

To some, Grenada to Charlotte might mean Old South to New South, a minor shift. To the McElwains, it might as well have meant Mississippi to Mongolia. Family members placed bets on how soon she'd be back.

They all lost.

"Literally three weeks later, I was behind a U-Haul truck. It was both the most exciting and the scariest day of

my life," she said. "That was definitely the pivotal moment in my life. I just never went home."

McElwain spent four years working in sales and business development for a payroll company and an accounting and finance recruiting firm and less than a year for a Web-development company, before she felt she had enough business experience to open her own marketing agency.

She founded Magnolia Marketing in August 2003 and began building a client base, mainly of nonprofit and government agencies.

She may not have literally gone home, but her past in Mississippi helped prepare her for a career in

North Carolina. Her father, Joe Mitch McElwain, spent 10 years in the Mississippi House of Representatives before his death in 1998, just a few months after his daughter had moved to Charlotte. Her mother, Maryhardy McElwain, ran Grenada's public library. She died three years ago.

From her mother, McElwain said she learned perseverance in a business world dominated by men. From her father, she learned the importance of public service and connecting with people.

Magnolia has worked with such diverse clients as the Mint Museum, Queens University of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County's Park and Recreation Department and Historic Rosedale Plantation.

The company helped Central Piedmont Community College with a \$46.5 million construction bond campaign in 2005. The firm's work on the campaign was "absolutely outstanding," CPCC President Tony Zeiss said.

McElwain's where she wants to be. "Charlotte is our home," she said.

"I've never really looked back. As soon as I got here, I knew I had an opportunity I wasn't going to give up."

*miw*  
50 Most Influential Women

A SUPPLEMENT TO

THE  
Mecklenburg  
TIMES

