

Meet Marilyn Deane Mendell



Marilynn Deane Mendell, is president of WinSpinCIC, Inc., a Virginia based consulting firm specializing in public relations and marketing strategy and implementation. An entrepreneur and artist, she has created and built several successful businesses and held key management and leadership posts in the arts, architecture and environment, professional services, and non-profit organizations. Widely recognized for her skill in successfully translating creative ideas into practical proposals, and persuasive proposals into successful projects, programs, and enterprises, she has received numerous local and national honors and awards and is frequently invited to lecture, write, and appear on TV. She was nominated in 2006 as the Woman of the

Year by Washington Women in Public Relations, and 1988 Woman of the Year by the New York State Department of Labor.

Her recent award-winning branding campaign for client Hickok Cole Architects in Washington, DC won the 2006 SMPS National & Local, Best Corporate Identity Award. A well recognized regional and national speaker and author; Mendell has been featured numerous times on Channel 7 (Buffalo, NY) and *Good Morning America*. Her recent speaking engagements in the A/E industry include keynote speaker for Zweig White National Conference 2007 and speaker for 2008, AIA Design DC (2006,2007, 2008),SMPS Regional Conference 2008, AIA CEU speaker, and 2007 NeoCon® East, 2008 NEO CON national.

A Magna cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, philosophy graduate of SUNY-Buffalo, she is an ardent environmentalist (She is the founder and president of the WorldWaterCenter.org) and historian and now lives on the banks of the Rappahannock River in historic Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Editor: Where were you born?

MDM: Baltimore, Maryland; on July 26th 1947

Editor: What was your childhood like?

MDM: Traveled all over the world.

Editor: Where did you go to school?

MDM: Seventeen different schools before I graduated from high school. My mother enrolled us in a different religion at each stop – probably my introduction to philosophy. My first language was Italian.

Editor: What kind of a student were you?

MDM: Dyslexic and a bit of a trouble maker; creative type—excelled in math though.

Editor: What were you like as a young woman?

MDM: Tom boy, a nature girl (still am), fished and stayed in the woods, drew botanicals.

Editor: Do you still paint?



Yes, watercolors and drawings of flowers. Today I work mostly in a very large format. I sell my work at local galleries.

Editor: What did you study in college?

MDM: Mine wasn't a straight path. I dropped out of the University of Wisconsin after studying Fine Arts for two years. Started a family and started my own business. I had 200 employees running the largest off premise catering business in Western New York. I went back to school (SUNY at Buffalo) and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy.

Editor: What did you do after you graduated from college?

MDM: I started working with non-profits helping them with marketing, PR, and business development. I moved to DC and began my own business, Win Spin CIC, Inc. where I do strategic marketing plans and organization and I re brand or re image architectural firms. I call it my "everywhere" approaches.

Editor: What is your strategic approach?

MDM: Planning, organization, art direction, branding, public relation...shall I say more?

Editor: Of course!

MDM: Social marketing and crisis management. I mostly do change management. It is an umbrella-approach where I help to hire the staff, train them and show them how to produce marketing results.

Editor: How do you give art direction to architects?

I work with many different types of clients, not just architects. In most cases my clients have graphic designers and I oversee their work. The ideas and concepts are usually mine and I guide the process. Sometimes I change the colors or I ask for a different colored envelop. Most of the time, I monitor consistency. As with the architects, I have been fortunate to have found a niche in the architectural community. I also have a fondness for green so I have the Phipps Botanical Gardens and Conservatory in Pittsburgh, and Oehme van Sweden landscape architects.

Editor: Why do you think you are so successful with your architect clients?

MDM: I produce results. I am the chart queen. I encourage people to be consistent and to see their efforts as one large campaign. Architects are not taught about marketing in school and in some instances it has been frowned on. Then there are the billable hours. I try to make things less complicated with concrete plans and methods to help streamline the process. I like a group that works as a team. If everyone is on board the job gets much easier for all concerned. There is an archive of all the articles I have written on my web site: www.winspincic.com. These articles can help the small firms learn a lot. It takes persistence and knowledge; that's where I come in.

Editor: What is your philosophy in life?

MDM: Tell the truth, be on time, and do more than what people expect of you. Have fun and.... family always comes first. I've followed my dreams, living each day to the fullest, and loving everything I touch, smell, see, and produce. Family and community service share a balanced place with my clients.



Editor: What is your business philosophy?

MDM: I have traveled extensively, read eclectically, and have a myriad of interests. This type of curiosity combined with years of experience and knowledge supports the creative talents my clients require for their campaigns. After thirty years in business I continue to keep my clients happy by maintaining a high level of integrity, balance and generosity. I like sharing the wisdom I have gained.

Editor: Who is your favorite philosopher?

MDM: Most of the Chinese philosophers—maybe Mencius

Editor: Who is your favorite Artist?

MDM: Hard question. I love art. My best friend just died, Andrew Topolski, two weeks ago. He was honored by the National Gallery, recently, as one of this past century's 100-greatest artists. To me he was like a brother and will be sorely missed. His drawings have an architectural look to them.

Editor: Who is your favorite musician?

MDM: Yo Yo Ma –because of his diversity

Editor: What is your favorite book?

MDM: Atlas Shrugged and Huck Finn.

Editor: Any teachers that influenced you?

MDM: William Bauhmer, professor of Philosophy at the University of Buffalo, who supported my effort to rewrite a chapter in the business ethics book by Patricia Werhane that he had used for ten years without questioning its validity until I came along. He edited my work and put me up for a scholarship. Not everyone would have been that gracious and supportive in the same situation. He helped me with the rewrite and spent hours with me editing the piece. He was the kind of guy I always want to strive to be when I grow up!

Editor: Any books that helped/influence you?

MDM: I think all of Tom Peters' books to this day. I like futurist's books like The Art of the Long View, The World In 2020, Radical Evolution, and the Experience Economy. In my line of work I have to know the trends. (It wouldn't hurt for architects to take a glance at these too.)

Editor: Do you have any heroes/any role models?

MDM: Yes, Marv Levy and Ed Rendell. I want to come back in my next life as a combo of the two.

Editor: Is there anything in your life that you had to overcome?

MDM: Sure everyone has hard times. My mother always said: "Be glad you have troubles they strengthen your character." I have had great mentors and life's events have taught me a great deal. You have to have a tough skin to get creative types to make changes and you also have to have empathy. Having an easy life doesn't always give one those insights.



Editor: How does it make you feel to see your artistic designs become reality?

MDM: Excited, happy. I jump up and down a lot....not very mature. Mostly, I like to see my clients happy and I have worked with great designers—like Sarah Barr at Hickok Cole Architects—she takes my concepts and makes them real in an award-winning fashion. Sarah is the real talent. And nothing really gets done well in my business without a fabulous print broker and I'd say Andy Kolls at Pretzelman fits that bill to the max!

Editor: Have you had any disappointments?

MDM: Sure, but it is mostly my fault for not communicating. I never want to stop learning and great communication, in my opinion, is the key to less disappointments.

Editor: Any regrets?

MDM: Gosh, sure again, tons—still every day—but the main point is that I live life to the fullest and I don't look back—for me it is what can I still do? There is so much I want to do and see. A positive attitude will keep you young and happy and healthy.

Editor: Tell us about the architects in your life.

MDM: Well, I have been around them for most of my life. My mother was Michael Grave's personal assistant; I was married to Mark Mendell for ten years. My son, Michael Tunkey, (Harvard GSD and VP at Cannon Design) heads up their office in Shanghai. My daughter-in-law, Elaine Chow, AIA (Columbia) practices architecture there as well. And now all of my clients!

What are your thoughts about the role of the architect in society?

Architects are like artists –they are the soul of our daily lives—without their designs we would have a sad work day. Our lives are so enriched because they create beauty—we are lucky they don't care how little they get paid or how many hours they work to produce their designs....

Editor: Would you recommend becoming an architect to a young person?

MDM: I tried really hard to talk Mike and Elaine out of that path...

Editor: Do you think architects are as involved as they should be in the matters of the environment?

MDM: They do what they can—the client often needs to be educated.

Editor: What are your hobbies?

MDM: I fish, paint, garden and write. I have been working on a book about the art that is archived by our armed forces. It is titled: "The Art of the Pentagon." The Smithsonian books wants to publish it—we've just had a hard time getting a traveling show to go with it....some day soon.

Editor: What's the greatest challenge of Architecture industry?

MDM: Not sure I can answer that—directly. They usually hire me to brand them or help them with crisis management, or business development. The trend I see that concerns me is this appeal of the star architects. How to get the local stars recognition and how to get local clients to appreciate what they have locally? That has always been an issue for architects – and believe it or not, it even happens to the stars in their own home towns.



From my end, getting the local media to acknowledge the architects and credit them consistently in the articles they write about projects. Bob Ivy is right. The whole team should always be given credit.

Editor: What are some great accomplishments in your life?

MDM: My three brilliant sons James, Christopher and Michael. And learning to finally read! I read great authors; a major book a week—at least.

Editor: Thank you Ms. Mendell. It was an honor.