

STRATEGIES

Ideas for growing business

Self starters

ALPHARETTA ENTREPRENEURS WORK OUTSIDE CORPORATE MOLD

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With an "I Love Alpharetta" bumper sticker affixed to her car, Essie Escobedo happily recalls giving up her commute into the city and starting her own business from scratch 15 years ago.

It wasn't easy, but she regrets nothing. "I had to build both sides, the client base and workers," said Escobedo, the CEO of **Office Angels**. "But I had all that in close proximity here. I had lots



Essie Escobedo

of new businesses and businesses that were growing, and I also had the demographic of my workers right here."

She is among a growing number of professionals who have opted first to make their home in the upscale suburb of Atlanta, and then chose to work there as well — simply because they can.

"These are CEOs and executives who are highly educated, but are also mission-driven," explains Melissa Gordon, president of **EchelonCommunicate**, a coaching, consulting and training company that holds many of its coaching and training events in Alpharetta. "They are servant leaders who are truly creating companies to make the world a better place. There's an environment of reciprocity, of 'How can I help you?'"

A former filmmaker, Gordon said the experience of preparing and helping CEOs look good on camera sparked her interest in helping executives communicate effectively.

"I realized that depending on how I interviewed them and the questions I asked, they may show up as powerful and authentic, or they may not be as engaging," she said. "I started to formulate an approach that would help them be their best selves."

She found a niche market in entrepreneurs, brilliant and tech-savvy business people whose natural abilities may not lie in interpersonal communication, not that such things can't be taught and mastered, she added.

Her company is based out of **Roam**, a flex office space business with three locations, including Alpharetta. It's also one of Gordon's clients.

Like many of her clients and colleagues, her company's space needs vary from day to day.

"Entrepreneurs are moving around, and we don't always need a huge



Lisa Fiondella, CEO of **refocus Analytics LLC**, finds Alpharetta offers a growing number of networking opportunities with other companies, many of which are also technology-based.

JOANN VITELLI

conference room, but we need what we need when we need it," she said.

Flexibility seems to be the name of the game in Alpharetta, where those with sought-after skills may be raising families, semi-retired or simply looking for a live-work alternative to a 9-to-5 grind.

South Carolina-based **GoodCall** this year released a nationwide ranking of "Best Cities for Female Entrepreneurs," ranking Alpharetta at No. 1. According to the ranking list, 31 percent of establishments in Alpharetta are owned by

women. Peachtree City also made the list at No. 9.

"The climate is very conducive to creating a small business — male or female," said Escobedo. "I feel there is no discrimination. We're all here together and there's a lot of support to help fellow business owners succeed."

Escobedo's company provides back-office and support to growing small and medium-sized companies on an "as-needed" basis, either on-site or virtually.

Her staff, or "angels" as she calls them,

▶ ALPHARETTA BY THE NUMBERS

Population

62,298

Number of businesses

4,700

Average household income

\$123,427

Percentage of adults with
bachelor's degree or higher

62.7

SOURCE: GROWALPHARETTA.COM

are unlike temp staff in that each becomes familiar with clients and their respective needs over time, and provide everything from book-keeping and administration support to marketing and social media.

"I work with small business owners, consultants, coaches and solo-preneurs without a support staff," she said. "For a lot of small businesses, they don't need help until they need help."

Lisa Fiondella, CEO and founder of Alpharetta-based **refocus Analytics LLC**, moved to Alpharetta 18 years ago, finding it a nice place to raise her then 2-year-old daughter. She started her company here in 2014.

"It just made sense not only to put the company where I live, but Alpharetta is a vibrant, growing community," she said. "It's fascinating to see the businesses that have popped up and grown here."

For businesses, Fiondella said Alpharetta offers a good employee base, just about any real estate footprint one might need, and a growing number of networking opportunities with other companies, many of which are also technology-based.

"I think it's a market with the right combination of things," she said. "I'm a big proponent of a very diverse workforce. I only want the best, and a lot of their best find their way to Alpharetta."

Escobedo, too, chose Alpharetta as a home first. That was 25 years ago.

"Basically, there were cow pastures," she said. "When I moved here, there really wasn't infrastructure. It grew up around me."

It still has a small-town quality, she said, with a 45-minute drive to get to the North Georgia mountains.

"Alpharetta makes it very easy to do business. For a business license and permitting, they bend over backward to facilitate the process," she said. "It's just very pro-business."