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UP MAGAZINE

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Philadelphia, PA, Jul 11, 2006

By [Heleigh Bostwick](#) [PLN](#)

Janet Milkman

Janet Milkman is always on the move. As President and CEO of Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization 10,000 Friends, she's often on the road visiting those friends -- "300,000 friends if you count all the members of the groups I deal with," she laughs. 10,000 Friends has three offices across Pennsylvania including the home office in Center City Philadelphia, an office in Harrisburg near the state capitol, and one in Pittsburgh.

Founded in 1998, Milkman says, "10,000 Friends is about changing laws to strengthen communities, conserve environmental resources such as open space and farmland, and make sure that our tax dollars are spent wisely." As such, research and advocacy for community development corporations is the primary focus of the organization. Some of their recent initiatives include lobbying for legislation in Harrisburg to create a grant program for historic preservation projects and comparing infrastructure investment costs in new communities to those needed to maintain infrastructure in established communities.

Although 10,000 Friends is a not-for-profit organization, Milkman runs it much like a small business, grappling with small-business issues including payroll and worries about health insurance and other benefits. And, like all non-profit organizations, 10,000 Friends is financially helped by wealthy individuals and corporations, as well as grants.

Milkman has been with 10,000 Friends for seven years, the last three of which have been spent in her current position as President and CEO. Indeed, armed with a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and a number of years spent working for municipal government and other non-profit organizations such as Regional Plan Association (RPA), Milkman was well qualified to take on the challenges of running 10,000 Friends.

Because 10,000 Friends is an alliance of numerous organizations within the development and redevelopment industry, Milkman finds herself collaborating with planners, architects, engineers, developers, local officials, and even academics in her quest to create stronger communities in Pennsylvania. Along the way she has picked up knowledge about real estate development, government, and planning and seems to know a little bit about everything.

"A significant part of my job," says Milkman, "is to make it easier for politicians and developers to do the right thing, providing people with more choices such as smart growth developments instead of the usual cookie-cutter developments." She pauses, then adds, "There is more of a market for these types of developments than most people realize." The smart-growth developments that Milkman is referring to are communities that offer a mix of housing types and land uses as well as choices in modes of transportation such as walking, bicycling, bus or train service, and automobiles.

One of Milkman's obvious strengths is working with people. Milkman says that she enjoys the collaborative process and finds it productive. It's also a major source for identifying new opportunities and directions for 10,000 Friends to go in. "For

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instance," she says, "While every nonprofit has a strategic plan that it follows, a chance meeting with one particular agency resulted in 10,000 Friends shifting in a different direction." Collaboration also provides solutions to problems that can be adapted to the needs of 10,000 Friends. "I'm not a big fan of reinventing the wheel," she says, laughing.

Milkman feels that the collaborative process is best carried out in person and says, "It is important to meet face to face, one of the reasons we have three offices." Although with Pennsylvania being such a large state land-wise, Milkman finds email and teleconferencing inevitable – and invaluable. 10,000 Friends also sponsors an annual design awards program, honoring what the organization feels are good development projects.

The ability to compromise is something else that Janet Milkman excels at. Depending on the issue at hand, Milkman employs a strategy that she refers to as "shifting bedfellows." With such a wide range of people and groups to work with Milkman understands the value of compromise, especially when dealing with proponents of sprawl development such as the State Builders Association or Road Builders.

As a public policy advocate, Milkman emphasizes the need for skilled communicators saying, "Policy language typically deals with big picture issues that the layman has a hard time relating to." Milkman is working hard to overcome this by concentrating her efforts on converting policy language into sound bytes that people can understand and personally relate to because of their values. Given her track record, no doubt she'll succeed.

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