

Connecting the World

Information Transport Solutions continues to bring the power and freedom of networking technology — and a female perspective — to government, education and business clients across the Southeast

BY NANCY MANN JACKSON

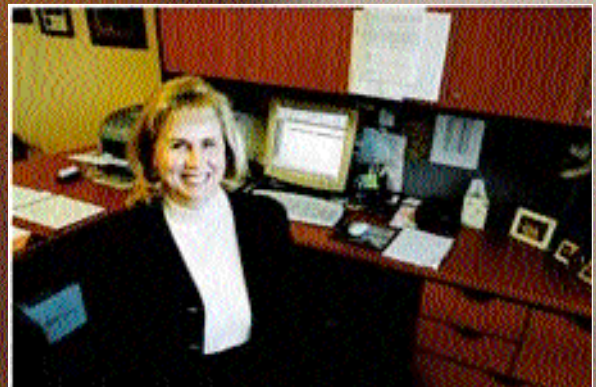
As American troops flew over Kuwait during the first Gulf War, flight maintenance personnel operated remotely for the first time, thanks in part to the work of a young female engineer from Alabama. As an engineer for the Department of Defense, Tomi Selby pioneered several key initiatives to help the U.S. military operate more efficiently.

After finding success in the male-dominated worlds of both the military and information technology, Selby launched her own company, Wetumpka-based Information Transport Solutions (ITS), in 1993. Today, ITS employs more than 30 people and posts annual revenue of more than \$10 million. Through ITS, Selby continues to bring the power and freedom of networking technology — and a unique female perspective — to government, education and business clients across the Southeast.

During Desert Storm in the early 1990s, Selby, then working as an engineer for the U.S. Department of Defense, used cutting-edge networking technology to help establish remote connectivity from stateside mainframe computers to Desert Storm troops. This allowed flight maintenance operations to continue without moving mainframe computers into the area of responsibility.

When the conflict ended, Selby leveraged the lessons learned from Desert Storm to establish remote mainframe connectivity over IP networks throughout the Air Force. This remote connectivity saved the government more than \$40 million annually and helped drive the wide scale deployment of IP networks at 135 bases worldwide.

Her experience working with the military on these

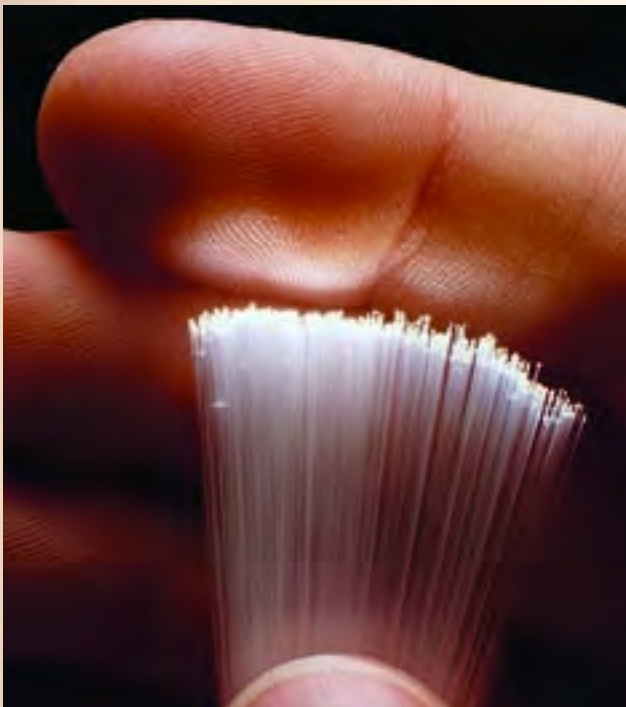


ITS CEO Tomi Selby

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projects offered an optimal training ground for launching a company like ITS, Selby says. “Working for the Department of Defense provided me the experience and confidence required to work on large, complex projects,” she says. “I also had two great bosses at the Gunter AFB who helped me to grow as an engineer and a leader. They taught me the structure and discipline required to succeed.”

As the leader of ITS, Selby continues to work with the military on a regular basis. Roughly 35 percent of ITS employees are retired military, guard members, prior civil servants or government contractors, she says. ITS is currently listed as a subcontractor to Analytical Services, Inc. on the Encore



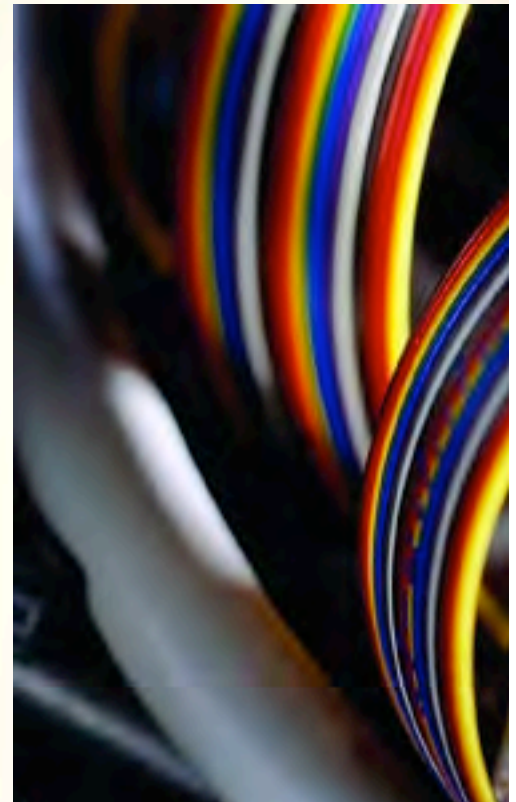
Contract and to Centech on the NETCENTS contract. According to Selby, these are contracting vehicles used by the government to obtain services, hardware, software and associated products to satisfy information technology activities at all operating

levels. The company has also completed cabling projects at Maxwell Air Force Base, Barksdale Air Force Base, and Dannelly Field, and has performed site surveys across the United States.

While her military connections and experience helped Selby to launch her company, she didn't stop there. Selby realized that the same networking solutions that benefited the military were needed in the education and private sectors, especially for new and emerging businesses. She made it a goal to help bring those solutions to new arenas, and for that reason, she sees ITS as a pioneer in the telecommunications industry in the Southeast.

“We have successfully deployed high-speed, fiber-based broadband access to over 30 counties in Alabama,” she says. “High-speed, broadband type access is the key to the future of economic development in Alabama. Providing equal access to schools and potential new businesses in Choctaw, Sumter, Marengo, Hale and Dallas counties is an accomplishment in which ITS takes great pride. We are now working to accomplish the same objective in Georgia, Florida, Mississippi and Louisiana.”

ITS' work hasn't just helped connect rural schools and startup businesses to the future. It has also brought the company great success. ITS has averaged 209.7 percent annual growth each year for the past



four years, and total growth of 839 percent since 2000, figures that earned the company a spot on *Inc. Magazine's* list of the 500 fastest-growing private companies in the country. Listed as 156th among the “*Inc. 500*,” published in January, ITS now takes its place among nationally recognized information technology companies.

“We're thrilled to be listed among the fastest-growing small businesses in the country,” says Selby. “Our goal is always to serve our clients. We've learned that by simply doing our job well, our company can experience phenomenal growth.”

ITS is one of only eight percent of companies listed on this year's *Inc. 500* that are owned by women. But being in the minority is nothing new for Selby, who's spent her career working in two male-dominated arenas, the military and the information technology industry.

“Being a woman in a male-dominated industry has been more beneficial than



anything else,” Selby says. “Men and women approach problems differently. I push each employee to think outside the box, so we’re able to develop fresh new ideas and techniques to solve problems for our customers.”

For Selby, part of that different approach is a focus on people as much as on systems and technology. “I have tried very hard to create a place where I would like to work, and one where the employees can be proud to say, ‘I work for ITS,’” she says. “I attribute 100 percent of our success as a company to dedicated, hardworking employees and great customers.”

As for her own personal success, “the keys have been passion and drive,” Selby continues. “My mother and grandmother taught me at a very young age that nothing was beyond my reach. They both were very strong women and I feel blessed they gave me a solid foundation.

On a daily basis I make decisions for ITS based on the value system they instilled in me.”

While ITS supports customers throughout the Southeast, the company has always been headquartered in the Montgomery, Ala., area, a location the CEO says has been an asset. “Alabama is a great state, and women have as much opportunity here as they do in any state,” Selby says.

With a stable, diversified economy and unique information technology resources, the Montgomery area has “absolutely” been a good place for her business, Selby says. As the state capital and home to an Air Force base, Montgomery’s economy has “remained very stable,” making it a viable choice for startup companies like ITS, according to Ellen McNair,

vice president of corporate development for the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce.

“The Montgomery area services a 22-county market, so lots of people come here to work, shop, go to the doctor, and other things,” McNair says. “We’re the center of central Alabama for those activities, so we draw from a much larger area than just the metropolitan area.” The city’s role as a regional center offers ITS and companies like it a wider pool for recruiting qualified workers and for locating new customers.

Because of the highly technical nature of its business, ITS faces a special challenge in recruiting a qualified work force. But the company’s location in the Montgomery area has been a special asset in meeting that challenge, according to Selby, and not just because of the city’s central location. “The biggest challenge faced by any employer in any industry is finding and keeping a trained work force,” she says. “But here, Maxwell Air Force Base, along with the Gunter Annex, provides a wealth of seasoned information-technology professionals.”

While the base offers a talented recruiting pool for companies like ITS, it also offers them plenty of business opportunities, according to McNair. “We are so fortunate to have at Maxwell the Air Force’s Standard Systems Group, which is responsible for the technology and software for the Air Force. They bid out technology contracts for the Air Force to different companies all over the country, such as ITS, which has completed contracts for Maxwell and Gunter. Having the Standard Systems Group based here has been a huge draw for bringing technology companies, such as ITS, to the Montgomery area.” ■