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Donna Allie keeps homes clean and lives on the straight and narrow

“I didn’t realize I was creating an organization”

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Mari Saito](#) Special to the Business Journal



Donna Allie

Donna Allie never thought she would one day be called a “Woman of Distinction.” She never even dreamed of being a business owner, much less the founder of one of the largest minority-owned business in the area: Team Clean Inc.

But 20 years ago, she was desperate. Then a single mother with a college degree that couldn’t land her job, Allie spent each day thumbing through the classified pages.

Eventually, she decided to run an ad in the newspaper offering her house-cleaning services. Her first job was at a Main Line home. Allie arrived with her own cleaning supplies and scrubbed the house, washed the laundry and completed all the chores that she was asked to do. At the end of the day, the client asked Allie how much she owed her.

Allie had no idea how much to charge.

In response, the client gave her a single \$20 bill.

Allie went home discouraged, never expecting the client to call back. But the homeowner did call back, and the phone hasn’t stopped ringing since.

In the three years following that first job, Allie's clientele in the Main Line grew to 55 homes. She soon enlisted her family members to help, recruited women from neighborhood churches and also employed women from West Africa. She drove a beat-up van around the city picking up her employees and transporting them to various homes on the Main Line.

"I didn't realize that I was creating an organization," she said. "It was just me backed up against the wall and I came out fighting."

Team Clean has since grown to employ more than 550 people in Philadelphia, with sales of more than \$16 million. The business no longer sends janitors to individual homes, but to large venues like Citizens Bank Park and the National Constitution Center.

All this is surprising for a woman who studied sociology in college and never had any formal business training. Allie said her company's growth can be attributed to the fact that she is never too shy to ask for help.

"I've always overcome challenges by surrounding myself with people who know how to do things better than me," she said.

Allie said that being a woman and a minority in business has shaped her business philosophy.

"Women in business tend to be more compassionate," Allie said. "We don't just look at our employees as widgets. They have faces, they're real people and they have families."

"[Allie is] energetic, straightforward and very clear about her goals, which is great," said Joanne Wright, vice president and general counsel at Team Clean Inc., who has worked with Allie since 2004. "She's also charmingly modest about the way this company started. I think it's inspirational, but I don't think she realizes that."

At Team Clean Allie insists on giving ex-offenders a second chance at employment. She hates the term "ex-offender" and believes in forgiveness and compassion, which stems partly from her spirituality.

"Someone gave me a chance and people are still giving me chances," Allie said. "I've made mistakes in my life, and if I wasn't forgiven for those mistakes, I wouldn't be where I'm at now."

Up Close

NAME: Donna Allie

AGE: 51

TITLE: President and founder

EMPLOYER: Team Clean Inc., Philadelphia

EXPERIENCE: Team Clean, president and founder (1989–present).

EDUCATION: Wilberforce University, BS in sociology, vocational rehabilitation (1980).

HOMETOWN: Bryn Mawr

CURRENT RESIDENCE: Merion Hills

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