

## Veteran runs defense company & plans more

By Cindy McGregor

Kris McGuire didn't have any experience in business, but that didn't stop her from becoming successful in the field.

She owns Victory Solutions Inc. in Huntsville, which employs 4 people at a design support facility in the Guntersville area.

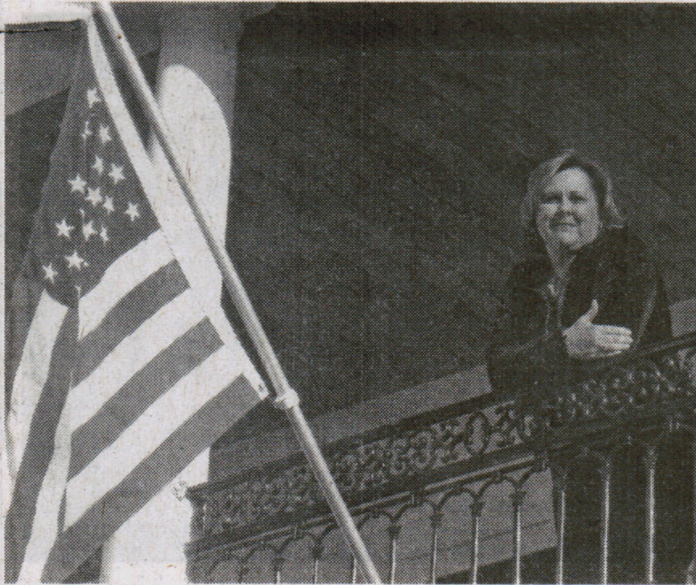
Born in Louisiana and an Air Force veteran, Mrs. McGuire was living in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, area with her husband, a Northwest Airlines pilot, and 2 daughters. The girls came to college in Alabama, and a couple of years later Mrs. McGuire decided to move to the area. She rented a car and drove around to look at real estate.

"The first night was a cold, rainy night in March, and there were seagulls everywhere," she said. "I fell in love with Guntersville. I had never lived in a small town before. But what I really fell in love with was the old armory in town. I was a liberal arts major. I thought, 'I'm going to buy that and live there.' But my husband said that was not realistic."

IN 2001 they moved to Guntersville and built a home in the River Pointe subdivision.

She began to try to get people interested in raising money to renovate the old armory. Making contacts with people in local and federal governments and businesses in Huntsville, she traveled to Washington to lobby for seed money for the project. With help from Congressman Robert Aderholt's office, she succeeded.

"All my life I've never been one to complete big projects. I have to push myself to completion," she said. "So when I got this armory project going, I wasn't going to quit, no matter what.



Kris McGuire stands on the balcony of her River Pointe home. She founded Victory Solutions Inc., a defense contractor, 5 years ago.

"That armory is my pride and joy. Just getting people interested in doing it was a job. But after we got the seed money, people got so excited. They started remembering that they had their first dance at the armory or their first kiss behind it," she said. "I'm so glad that I pushed myself to do that, because it was well worth it. It's one of my biggest accomplishments."

AFTER 2 OR 3 years she started lobbying for commercial aerospace companies.

"I was approached by several seasoned businessmen in Huntsville to start my own business doing defense contracting," Mrs. McGuire said. "I thought that was crazy because I didn't know the first thing about it. I didn't even know what the Arsenal was. I didn't know what all the acronyms stand for."

She could have let the idea drop, but she didn't.

"I thought, 'If I can get this business going and be successful, that would be a real accom-

plishment for me.' I went to the bank for a line of credit. I thought they were going to turn me down flat," she said. "I'd never done this before, never had a business. It had been 27 years since I had worked."

But the bank gave her the money, and she was suddenly a business owner.

"WE DECIDED right off that we would hire the best engineers we could find to do high-grade engineering work. We didn't want to be put into a category classified as doing low-end work," she said. "I hired people who knew how to manage the money and do the contracts, people who knew what they were doing to help me. The day we opened the door, I had full, good benefits for my employees."

On Sept. 15, Victory Solutions turned 5 years old. In October the company opened an office in Charleston, South Carolina, and now has people working in 7 states.

"It's kind of a milestone because you can either make it or break it in 5 years. We paid off that line of credit a year and a half ago, and we're debt free," she said.

The company does engineering support services for the government, particularly NASA and the Army, and high-performance computing for the Department of Defense. A current research project explores the use of composites - fabrics layered and then heated - in defense and commercial applications.

THE PROJECT in Guntersville continues, and she hopes to bring more defense contracts to the area. She also wants to start businesses to employ special-needs people and service-disabled veterans.

"I got the idea when I was in Savannah, Ga.," she said. "Gulfstream is doing a project like that. When I saw those people, how happy they were and so particular about their work, I thought, 'We have to do that here.' There are a lot of people who just need a chance to do something. We're going to start a model here and try to grow it

throughout the state."

She said she didn't have to start a business to be fulfilled, but she needed the challenge.

"I WAS A mom and wife all those years. I never thought about having a career, much less running a company," she said. "You know what I found out with this business? I totally love what I do."

Mentors who guided her along the way were essential.

"Mentors open the doors and tell you where the landmines are. I could never have done this if I hadn't had good mentoring. It's invaluable in everything, not just business," she said.

"The message is that people can do anything they set their mind to. You don't have to have a Ph.D. to be successful. You have to be very, very persistent. I call it persistence with love. There's a fine line in being persistent and being pushy. You have to find the balance."