

# ERICA WAASDORP

Erica Waasdorp, a Netherlands native, works on a mailing for a non-profit client from her Marstons Mills home office. She uses data bases and marketing expertise to create mailings that produce results: namely, donations.



## Helping non-profits increase funding through direct mailings with heart

BY JUDITH SHAW BEARDSLEY

**H**ave you recently opened your mailbox to find it full of what you consider "junk" mail, envelopes sent in hopes of getting you to donate money or make a purchase? In other words, mail that you haven't requested and suspect is a waste of your time?

Before you are so quick to judge, meet Erica Waasdorp. A 46-year-old native of The Netherlands, Waasdorp is a warm, yet clearly efficient woman who's professional life is centered on direct mail. Her company, A Direct Solution, works for about 10 clients on the Cape who depend on her expertise to reach potential donors. Whether it's CHAMP Homes, the American Red Cross or the Jonathan Brain Recovery Organization, the causes are ones that she wants to see thrive.

How did Waasdorp make her way from the Amsterdam office of Reader's Digest to an office over her garage in Marstons Mills? After more than two decades of working in marketing for Dutch publishing companies, marriage to an American brought her to the States in 1993. Her first job was as a secretary for the International Fund for Animal Welfare. The international agency was a perfect fit for someone who speaks Dutch, German, Spanish and French, as well as being totally

RON SCHLOERB/CAPE COD TIMES

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fluent English.

By the time she left IFAW, she was marketing manager of planned giving with nine people working for her and programs in seven countries. She increased their annual fund-raising from \$5 million to \$18 million a year.

Next was a position as vice president of fundraising for DMW, a direct response agency in Plymouth, where her clients included the American Humane Association, Cape Symphony Orchestra, Center for Coastal Studies, and a variety of public television stations across the country. Her work there suggested another professional opportunity.

Married to Lt. Col. Patrick McNamara, a director of personnel at Otis Air National Guard Base, with two teenage stepsons, Patrick and Brendan, as well as (let's not forget) a cat, Sientje, the idea of working from home in Marstons Mills was an appealing option. Most importantly, she saw the real need for her kind of knowledge on the Cape. So, she opened her own firm three years ago.

"There are 1400 non-profit organizations on the Cape, and I saw a lot of smaller agencies that really

needed help but couldn't afford either in-house staff or most consultants' prices," she says. "Direct mail is very specialized. Identifying the right people to send to, targeting your approach to donors, making your piece stand out from the rest without it costing a lot – it's a more complicated business than people realize. I knew I could help organizations with database analysis and then working with a designer, copywriter and printer to manage the whole process," she explains. "I also get involved in thank-you letters and special thank-you events. Really, I like to be their 'in-house development person,' without being in-house," she adds.

Having worked in both the non-profit and for-profit worlds, Waasdorp believes the charitable organizations that are going to do well today have to take a "for-profit" business approach. "They have to find those reasons why people will want to donate to them," she emphasizes. "The major difference is that for a non-profit, the donor sets the price. He or she doesn't really care how an organization is structured; he's interested in the mission. Of course he wants to invest in an organization that does good work and spends the

money wisely."

Her goal is communicating to potential donors that her non-profit client does, in fact, fit those criteria. "My job is to have the potential donor at least open the envelope, and then tell a story that grabs him. Donors have a lot of choices. The letter needs to motivate the donor enough to make a donation or at least to want to learn more about your organization."

While there are many fund-raising tactics – special events, phone calls, e-mails – Waasdorp has a lot of confidence in the power of direct mail, providing it's well designed and well targeted.

For evidence, she points to a recent survey by the United States Postal Service. It indicates that consumers are eager to see what's in their mail, with more than half of respondents saying that receiving mail is a "real pleasure." She cites these survey results: Home mail is handled and sorted by the household decision-maker 81 percent of the time by the person who pays the household bills, and 67 percent of respondents said mail is more personal than the Internet and they use it to learn about new products or services, to manage

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the household and to oversee their finances.

She adds: "When people get a letter, they can sit down any time and read it. They decide when they want to 'engage.'"

Waasdorp, who says she is passionate about the causes she herself volunteers for, like the Boy Scouts, says it's no accident that her company's logo has a heart in its center. "With my company, I feel I can make a difference, whether it's for a better environment, someone who's homeless, or a needy animal. With non-profit organizations, you work with really nice people, too. But I'll only take on non-profits I feel personally comfortable with," she adds.

Despite a home-based office, Waas-

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dorp says her job tends to be a seven-day-a-week proposition. But when time permits, she likes walking on the beach, skiing, reading, traveling, and ballroom dancing with her husband. The oldest of four in her family, she still goes back to Holland once a year.

Fundamentally, she loves what the Cape offers: "Having come from a small country where people live on top of one another, I really appreciate the space here. There are 16 million people in The Netherlands – to have a half-acre of land there, you'd have to be a millionaire. And yet, the Cape is a small world. I also love always running into people I know," she adds.

Impressed with the enthusiasm of Cape Codders, Waasdorp says, "I'm always amazed at how much people on the Cape do for non-profits and how loyal they are to their organizations." Still, not everyone can be supportive of every cause. Waasdorp advises that if you're receiving direct mail from charities in which you have no interest, "For your own sake, as well as the charity's sake, call and ask that your

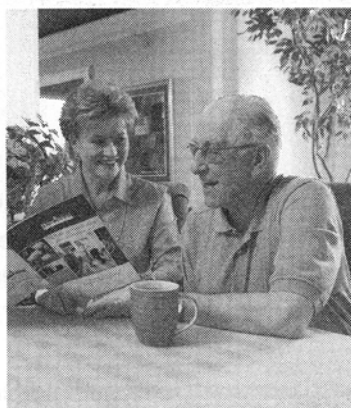
name be removed from their mailing list, or perhaps ask that you hear from them only once a year if you're getting multiple messages."

First, though, you might want to read more of that "junk" mail. The odds are it's coming from a dedicated agency that deserves public support. If you find that the organization's mission doesn't match your own interests, you can toss the letter out. Taking that minute or two to read it won't cost you anything. Perhaps you'll even discover a cause that touches you and that you decide is worth volunteer involvement.

## About the author

*Judith Shaw Beardsley wandered into public relations after graduating with an English degree from Smith – mainly because she couldn't find a journalism job, she says. She stayed for 35 years, including 10 as PR Director for the American Hospital Association in Chicago. She has two adult sons and a great daughter-in-law. Judy lives in Orleans with husband, Chris, and their cockapoo, Tarifa.*

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