

susan duggan

turning point



SCOTT LEWIS PHOTO

DAUGHTER OF THE WEST Although Susan Duggan has focused her career on international work, she dreams of owning a ranch on the Peninsula, where she grew up.

bio

Title/company: CEO/Silicon Valley World Internet Center
Age: 47
Hometown: Woodside
Residence: Palo Alto
Family: Single
Education: Bachelor's degree in anthropology, Stanford University, 1977; master's degree in political science/international relations, Université Laval in Quebec, 1980; master's degree in education/political science, Stanford University, 1984; and doctorate in education/political science, Stanford University, 1988
Hidden talent: Splitting logs (I'm a wedge-and-sledgehammer gal).
Business book recommendation: "The Other 90%", by Robert Cooper.
Three items we would always find in your refrigerator: Veuve Clicquot Champagne, DiGiorno pizza, salsa.
Favorite vacation destination: Any beach with warm water.
Favorite Web site: eBay's Western saddles listings.
Favorite type of music: 1940s jazz.
Greatest fear: Rats!
Best piece of advice you've received: From my father: "Remember, we all put our pants on one leg at a time."

Harnessing opportunities

Susan Duggan seemed destined for a career in academia, until a historic event led her in a different direction

By JENNIFER MARAGONI

Susan Duggan knew she wanted to be a cultural anthropologist long before most kids can pronounce cultural anthropologist.

"I decided at the age of 8 that I wanted to be a cultural anthropologist. I just decided it," Duggan says with a chuckle, explaining that her father was an international businessman who displayed artifacts around the house and taught her about different cultures.

Duggan was unwavering in her decision, earning a bachelor's degree in anthropology from Stanford University at age 21. She followed that with two master's degrees and a doctorate, spending much of that time studying abroad. And while "cultural anthropologist" may not be the title on her business card, she has made a career of understanding the languages, behaviors and customs of people around the world.

As co-founder and CEO of the Silicon Valley World Internet Center in Palo Alto, Duggan brings together executives from technology companies worldwide so they can share their knowledge and build relationships. In addition to serving as neutral ground where tech heavyweights and

startups can collaborate, the center is a think-tank and showcase for Internet-related technologies.

"They aren't going to share their companies' secrets, but they have ideas about technologies and trends that they want to share," she explains. "And, really, a lot of it is about egos. I mean, if you knew something about something, wouldn't you want other people to know?"

Duggan isn't the typical Silicon Valley CEO — if there is a such thing. For one thing, the Peninsula native makes sure she has plenty of time for her hobbies, which include singing in jazz bands, riding horses and roping cattle.

Yes, roping cattle.
 "It's a bit unusual, I suppose," says Duggan, bursting out in laughter. "I just thought it was a cool idea. I tell my staff 'Please don't schedule programs on Tuesday nights so I can go roping.'"

Duggan's eyes light up when she talks about her beloved horse, Rey, and the eight saddles she has purchased online. If she wasn't CEO of the World Internet Center, she says she'd be happy running a tack shop.

"She's such a warm person and different than you'd expect from a corporate exec," says longtime friend Alan Lamont, an engineer at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. "She's got a lot of interests outside of work."

And while Duggan is clearly passionate about the mission of the World Internet Center, she never set out to become an entrepreneur or CEO. Rather, she initially set her sights on a career in international education, which would fulfill her interests

in both cultural anthropology and education. After earning four college degrees and spending a year as a chancellor scholar in Germany, Duggan seemed destined to forge a career in academia.

But while she was in Germany, the Berlin Wall, which had separated East and West Berlin since 1961, was torn down. The event had a profound impact on Duggan.

"Being in Germany for that year and watching Eastern Europe unfold in a different way was a major turning point," she recalls. "Suddenly, structures opened up economically and I was watching people trying to grab onto ideas, educational opportunities and economic opportunities. Coming back to the Bay Area, I wanted to help people turn opportunity into value."

She envisioned providing high-level education to decisionmakers, such as corporate executives.

"If you can affect the executive, you affect the whole company," she says. "The valley's focus on technology made it a great place to set up my own shop and bring people from all over the world to access the knowledge base here."

First, Duggan took what she calls a "four-year segue." In 1992, she co-founded Lexia Exchange International, a nonprofit organization that set up study abroad programs for American universities.

"That was my way of getting used to running my own business," she says. "I tested the waters and learned what not to do."

While at Lexia, she also served as a senior policy consultant to the National Security Education Program in Washington, D.C.

Then, in 1996, she left Lexia to co-found the World Internet Center with

three other local professionals.

Some of Duggan's friends from her Stanford days were surprised with her decision to leave academia to run her own company.

"It was a big step and seemed so entirely different than what she had planned to do," says Lamont, who has known Duggan since he was a graduate student and she worked in the International Center at Stanford. "I was quite doubtful at first, but she seems to be making it work."

The other founders of the World Internet Center have gone their separate ways, but remain in touch with Duggan. One co-founder, Mark Heyer, says Duggan has been instrumental in the World Internet Center's success.

"She's carried the flame," says Heyer. "She's attracted some good people to help, but she's really been the kingpin."

Duggan has big plans for the World Internet Center. For example, she'd like to see branches open worldwide. When asked what she expects to be doing in 10 years, Duggan says that rather than running the day-to-day operations of a company, she hopes to be an international ambassador.

"And I want to have my hacienda ranch by then," she adds. "I'll probably have more horses — and more saddles — by then."

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