

# woman

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**AT&T's New Belle:**  
Sylvia Anderson

Updating  
your Wardrobe  
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**Sylvia Anderson**

President  
AT&T, Georgia

# Built for Success and having fun

By Mary Welch

**T**he room cleared. Anderson was left in the big corporate boardroom. There was only one thing to do. “It was so formal in that room and I was so happy,” she says. “So when everyone left I just had to do a little dance, a little victory dance. Then I gained my corporate composure and left the room.”

The corporate side of Anderson is just a second away from a more playful, fun and joyous side. “Well, the merger was almost completed and I got a call asking me how I would like to be the new president of AT&T Georgia,” she states simply. “I replied that I would like that very much.” And then she breaks out into a hearty laugh.

“I still get goose bumps whenever I say or hear that title,” she says. “It makes every bad day I’ve every had worth it. Also, every position I had helped me prepare for it. I was built to succeed and I work at it 24-7. I can’t say I aspired to ever be president, but I’m honored to have been chosen. Frankly, all the stars are in alignment, both personally and professionally.”

Personally, it means that she will soon be an empty nester. Son Eric, 20, is a sophomore at the University of Florida, while son Kevin is a senior in high school. Recently divorced and planning a “year-long” celebration of turning 50 this year, Anderson says the time was right.

Her job still involves dealing with the aftermath of the merger, such issues as the role AT&T will play in the community as well as connecting with the 25,000 employees in Georgia.

“Telecommunications has changed so much

It was a very important executive meeting at AT&T headquarters in San Antonio, Texas. The company had just completed its \$67 billion acquisition of BellSouth and it was announced that the new president of AT&T Georgia would be Sylvia Anderson, who headed up AT&T’s state legislative and regulatory affairs in the Southeast. Congratulations were quickly offered in a muted corporate fashion. Anderson accepted them graciously.



**Sylvia Anderson**  
President  
AT&T Georgia

over the years and it's not a local business anymore," she says. "BellSouth was going to be bought. It was going to happen and I'm glad that it's now part of the AT&T family. You have to have the right size, scale and compatibility to be successful."

Her key goal, post-merger is to "get customers and employees to feel as good about the company as I do," she says. "We'll be in this transition period for a while. We just have to wow our customers with our service and our products. We have to work with the Governor and Mayor so we will be viewed as a good corporate citizen. We have to have our employees feel good about being an AT&T employee. And then we have to go out and have fun. It's a lot better working when you're also having fun!"

Anderson's blend of business and fun is appreciated by her colleagues and associates.

"Sylvia is a very passionate person with extraordinary ideas and special talents who has made vital contributions to the City of Atlanta," said Mayor Shirley Franklin. "The City of Atlanta congratulates Sylvia on her new position as State President of the New AT&T in Georgia and wishes her many more successes to come in the future."

Georgia Attorney General Thurbert E. Baker notes that Anderson is a "unique corporate executive. She's been able to deftly blend the leadership skills required in a sometimes tough corporate environment with the compassionate sensitivities needed in dealing with a diverse client base." Adding, "Sylvia can quickly reduce complex problems to the least common denominator and find consensus among opposing views. She will be a tremendous asset both to this state and AT&T as its new statewide president."

Anderson's trek to the executive suite can be traced back to her childhood as an "Army brat." Her father was "regular Army" who retired as a master sergeant. Born in Nurnberg, Germany, she moved at least a dozen times during her childhood. "There were five of us children and I wouldn't be sitting here if it were for those experiences and the exposure to different countries and people I got by living abroad and learning to adjust quickly. It made be the person I am today."

Her first career goal was to become a nun. Then a teacher. "You can see I was attracted to women-dominated fields," she says with a laugh.

The legal professional started to intrigue her during her sophomore year at Rutgers University. "I just began to picture myself as a lawyer," she says. "I liked the breath of the field."

Her first job after graduating from Rutgers Law School was with the U.S. Department of the Defense. "It was the first job offer I got," she says. "I didn't have a clear sense of what I wanted to do. I was open to anything."

She ended up doing a lot of transactional law with the Navy and found she enjoyed it. "I didn't mind being in the hot seat and I wasn't intimidated by the politicians or the military. It challenged me and I found my confidence. I learned how not to be afraid and use my voice."

In 1992 a friend of hers told her about a "dream job" at AT&T, which needed an attorney who can help them go after large government contracts. "I felt right at home," she says. "I knew the DOD and it wasn't a difficult leap into corporate America." She started in Greensboro, N.C., as a senior attorney.

She found that "as long as I produced results I was moved along to a new position. I liked every one I had. The appeal was that I wasn't locked in and I could explore new fields and challenges."

In 1996 she moved to Atlanta where she was promoted to general attorney, supporting AT&T's entry into the local telecommunications market. In 2000, she became vice president of law and government affairs for the Southern region. Following the completion of AT&T's merger with SBC Communications, she led the State Legislative and Regulatory Affairs department in the Southeast.

She was – and still is – frequently at the Capital espousing the company's position of legislation.

State Senator Earl Earnhardt calls her "spectacular. She the most professional person I've every dealt with. As pleasant as she is professional. She's completely will informed on the issues. I can sit down and talk with her like I would a neighbor. She is very easy to approach"

Only a few months into her job, Anderson is settling in. Saying that giving back to the community is important, she repeatedly promises that BellSouth's civic generosity will be matched by AT&T's. The company's philanthropy may focus on technology and her personal favorite cause, education. What about the BellSouth Golf Classic? "You mean the AT&T Golf Classic?" she shoots back.

She is also looking for a little more balance in her life. Running puts her in a "happy place," and she says she enjoys reading and hanging with her girlfriends. She's thinking of moving closer to her Buckhead office but insists that she won't move anywhere that won't accept her beloved chocolate lab Chip. "He's always so happy to see me," she says.

Happiness. It comes up often in her vocabulary. She's getting use to the title, although she says it was initially a little uncomfortable saying she was the president in social situations. But she's gotten over that.

"Being the president and this title is an integral part of who I am," she says. "And people better deal with it. We've got a great team, great products and we're a great company. What's not to be happy about? The fun is just starting."