



***Paula Lawton Bevington***  
***Vice President Development- SciTrek***

***An Atlanta Icon of Leadership***

It's difficult to imagine anyone in Atlanta's business or civic community who doesn't know Paula Lawton Bevington. Over the years, she has distinguished herself as a successful businesswoman, fundraiser, philanthropist, and community leader. As a result, she has become an Atlanta icon of leadership. Nevertheless, there are men and women who perhaps don't know her accomplishments and for whom she isn't a household name. This profile's for them.

Call her the energizer bunny of "can-do" leadership. In whatever forum she's engaged, Mrs. Bevington (Paula) is known for consistently keeping up the pace and being pleasantly persistent in achieving her goals. This has been her *modus operandi* throughout her life.

***Early view of the world***

Life began for Paula in Cleveland, OH. She was the eldest of three children in a family headed by her father, an Aetna insurance executive. Interestingly, Olympian Jesse Owens also had a daughter born the same week in the same hospital as Paula. Neither families nor babies came in contact because they were segregated by color. For Paula, eliminating injustice and reaching out across cultural and socioeconomic boundaries would become a part of her life's mission.

Growing up, Paula and her family moved to Connecticut and, briefly, Minnesota for her father's work. She attended a girls' high school and went on to Saint Mary's College in Indiana. Saint Mary's, an independent women's college near Notre Dame, was an easy choice for young Paula who graduated *magna cum laude*. After all, it was her mother's alma mater and her father had graduated from Notre Dame. Her next choice, however, may not have been so easy.

Intellectually bright and with an interest in the law, Paula applied and was accepted at Yale Law School. "Yale was a great experience," she said, "even though there were only 9 women out of a class of 180. We were treated very respectfully."

As a Yale law graduate, Paula considered herself prepared and ready for the world of work. She came to Atlanta to join her family, where her father had started the Georgia International Life Insurance Co. One thing she hadn't anticipated was difficulty finding a

job. “As a female attorney, I actually ran into a lot of ‘don’t bother to apply’ situations,” she said candidly. “But just when I was becoming desperate, I received an offer from the firm of Sutherland Asbill & Brennan and eagerly accepted it.”

“Working there was satisfying but something was missing,” Paula explained. As a result she applied for a position on the staff of the Peace Corps in Washington, D.C. and also for a Fulbright Scholarship. The Peace Corps job materialized and not long after so did the Fulbright, so her time in Washington was short. The Fulbright took her to Venezuela where she lived for the next year, a period of great unrest. “Thus began what I call “my life’s odyssey,” said Paula.

#### *World view expands in Venezuela*

Paula’s knowledge and views of the world were clearly impacted by her experience in Venezuela. Looking back today, she sees things that are alarmingly similar. Her exposure included the study of comparative law, understanding the importance of oil as a country’s natural resource and heritage, leftist views regarding US-owned companies – all pertinent to current events of 2003.

While Paula’s expanded world view was a valuable benefit of her Fulbright experience, her contraction of Hepatitis A surely was not. Thus, for health reasons, she left Venezuela and decided to return to the states, by way of Europe.

At the conclusion of the academic year, Paula had the good fortune to take a trip around the world, journeying west across the Pacific and seeing Europe for the first time after visiting several Asian countries. Traveling alone was occasionally lonely but more often an advantage, as she was invited to visit in the local homes of friends of friends.

For Paula, coming home might be called providential, as she would soon meet and marry a gentleman named Milton Bevington. Milton, a widower, had three sons and together, they would continue to raise his three children as well as five more of their own, for a total of eight – all boys except for one daughter. Family was Paula’s first priority while Milton’s business took them back to the mid-west for a while. It was there her husband started the Consumer Products division of the Trane Co.

After several years in Wisconsin, the Bevington family moved back to Atlanta. In 1974, Milton started his own energy engineering company, Servidyne, utilizing his knowledge of air conditioning industry. Six years later, Paula decided to join her husband in the business and together, they orchestrated a transition from a hands-on, blue-collar maintenance business model to a high tech, energy management consulting model. Throughout the 80’s and 90’s, the new business model flourished under their leadership. So much so that in 2003, Servidyne won the EnergyStar Buildings Partner’s Award for the third time.

In May of 2001, the winds of change brought a new challenge and a new opportunity. The company that Milton founded and Paula co-directed became a subsidiary of Abrams Industries, a NASDAQ-listed and publicly traded corporation. Paula left the company in

late 2002, having been, as she describes it, somewhat “afloat” during the summer of that year. It didn’t take long for the word to spread that this lady of so much experience and talent was available. A mutual friend brought Paula’s name to Lewis Massey at SciTrek just when he was looking for a new VP of Development. It was good business match-making. It was also tough times and a turn-around was underway.

On January 6, 2003, SciTrek officially gained Paula’s services and the opportunity to leverage her many skills, not the least of which is fundraising. About the job, Paula said with characteristic honesty, “I’m enjoying it but it’s also been sometimes daunting. I’m happy to say it’s beginning to even out.”

It’s clear that Paula’s passion for her new project is high. “I’m so impressed with what SciTrek is doing,” she said, “exciting children when they’re ready to be excited.” And, with every contact, Paula eagerly shares this excitement, the SciTrek story and its vision for the future. That includes the Computer Clubhouse, overnights, new exhibits and alliances for space exploration, communications, health and life sciences, the environment, etc. Sounding like a proud parent, Paula suggests, “Funding people are beginning to catch the spirit.”

With Paula making the pitch, it’s certainly no wonder. This is a woman who in 2001 chaired the annual Atlanta Legal Aid Society campaign, raising over \$1,000,000 from the metro legal community. This is the same woman who has been the president or chair of Atlanta’s Junior League, American Red Cross Chapter, Emory’s Friends of Music, the Georgia Human Relations Commission, the Georgia Council for International Visitors, the National Conference of Christians and Jews / GA region, UNICEF-Atlanta, the Yale Club of Georgia, and the Rotary Club of Atlanta (first woman ever to hold this position.) She’s also a past board member of the World Trade Center, Atlanta, the Society of International Business Fellows and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. Her awards include the YWCA Academy of Women Achievers, Saint Mary’s College Distinguished Alumna Award, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center Community Award, the Roz Cohen Community Action Award from the National Council of Jewish Women, the NCCJ Brotherhood / Sisterhood Award, the Claven Award, the Atlanta Legal Aid Society’s Outstanding Service Award, and a alumni of Leadership Atlanta.

In addition to her new roll at SciTrek, and in her spare time, Paula is the current chairman of the Justice Center of Atlanta and the Board of Councilors at The Carter Center.

Suffice it to say that Paula Lawton Bevington’s legacy of leadership is still in progress. No doubt, other chapters will be written about her contributions as an icon of leadership in Atlanta, including her work with SciTrek. Nevertheless, one thing still needs to be said. She’s already a SHero of the highest order, a SHero of SHeroes, a leader who has earned the respect and admiration of leaders of both genders as well as people at all levels. Could she / should she be a figure of influence on the national or global scene in the future? What about Ambassador Bevington? Now, that has a nice ring to it!

February 2003

By Susan B. Hitchcock (Creator of The Age of SHEroes / book research)