

# WHEN IT PAYS TO BE A BIG FISH IN A SMALL POND

Job opportunities are abundant

at small companies for

independent new graduates

By Kevin Collins

**W**hen Mary Hecht accepted a sales engineer's position at Stonhard Inc., a small but growing manufacturer in Maple Shade, N.J., she had no idea she would be assigned to a major project team within a few months.

"That's one of the best things about working for a small company," says Hecht, an industrial engineering major at the University of Pittsburgh. "You get a chance to really shine if you make the effort. I worked on a project with one of the company vice presidents, which was a great opportunity to show upper management I was willing to go above and beyond the call of duty."

Job-hunting new graduates take note: There are plenty of career opportunities out there in small- to medium-sized companies. According to the Small Business Administration, small businesses accounted for more than half of all new jobs created in the U.S. between 1976 and 1986. And, as Mary Hecht and other graduates have discovered, small doesn't necessarily mean limited. The benefits of working for a small company can be truly unique.

Gaining experience quickly is what attracts most recent graduates. Since small companies depend on their employees to wear many different hats, new hires are often assigned significant responsibilities early on—an ideal situation for your first professional position. And if you're interested in working close to home after college, small businesses can provide job opportunities that simply aren't available with many larger employers.

The ultimate allure of small firms, especially to entrepreneurial new graduates, is their informal atmosphere and fast pace. Even in the busiest of times, there's a certain shirt-sleeves camaraderie, an all-for-one attitude that's hard to find among industrial conglomerates. Karen Dombrowski says this atmosphere is one of her company's main attractions.

After earning a communications degree at Pitt, Dombrowski became a dis-

tributive sales representative for C.A. Curtze Co., a wholesale food distributor in Erie, Pa. "One of the big pluses in working here is the 'team effort' approach to problem-solving—everybody chips in to help," she says. "You get to know just about everyone's first name, and you really feel like you're part of a family."

Of course, being part of the family means taking on your share of the chores. For this reason, small companies look for new grads with two crucial characteristics: versatility and dedication.

## Versatility

Every sports team has at least one member who can be counted on to fill in wherever needed. These "utility players" help the company meet important deadlines by providing support at a moment's notice.

Small companies usually are in a state of flux. They're constantly growing and redefining their goals. As a consequence, organizational hierarchies are much less rigid than those at established corporations.

"In a small company, you don't have a direct chain of command," says Mary Hecht in New Jersey. "You may find yourself report-

