

## Xerox promotion deserved, local women execs say

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Webster, N.Y. — Ursula Burns will take the reins from current Xerox CEO Anne Mulcahy on July 1, and in doing so, will become the first African-American woman to head a Fortune 500 company. Of the 500 CEOs, 12 are female, according to Fortune magazine.

Burns was unavailable for an interview, but she did have a few things to say to the 2009 graduating class at the Rochester Institute of Technology following the announcement last month.

"I can assure you that no one at my graduation commencement was pointing at me and predicting I would be the CEO of anything," she told a laughing audience.

Sandra Parker, a Webster resident and CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance (RBA), said she was thrilled to hear of Burns' promotion.

"She worked hard to get where she is," she said.

Parker knows something about hard work, having risen to her current job from a position in the human resources department at RIT. She said her strength as a mediator has served her well at the alliance, where she handles issues at the city, county and state level.

Parker cited the great working relationship between Mulcahy and Burns, who together helped a floundering Xerox regain success when Mulcahy took over in 2001.

"I think they were as successful as they were because they turned back to the basics and focused on the customers," she said. "I think that trait tends to be more focused on by women, though it's not to say that men don't possess that either. Women in general are making progress, but there is still room to grow."

Brighton resident Suzanne Clarridge, founder and CEO of online grocery store My Brands, said while she isn't too familiar with Burns, she has run into her on occasion.

My Brands, which has a warehouse located in Henrietta, is an online grocery store that helps stores and consumers alike get brand-name products. Clarridge started as a product manager, a position that didn't involve many women.

"I think it's good to recognize that a woman can hold a senior position," she said of Burns. "I saw a big change (in Xerox) with Anne Mulcahy, and Burns is stepping into a big role."

Lauren Dixon, CEO of Victor-based public relations firm Dixon Schwabl, said she wasn't surprised to hear of Burns' new position.

The Canandaigua resident and the firm's founder said she was "thrilled and delighted because (Burns) was the logical choice. She was side-by-side with (current CEO Anne Mulcahy) during some pretty difficult times, so it was no surprise because she was a natural fit," Dixon added.

Dixon started out in business at a time when it was mostly a man's world.

"It was a fraction," she said of women in power positions in business. "But I used that as an opportunity; I never paid much attention to the fact that I wasn't a man."

Along with Clarridge, Dixon regularly blogs on the Women Entrepreneurs Blog site through University of Rochester's Simon School of Business, which answers questions from women of all ages about how to get their businesses started. She said she is ready for the day when there isn't much talk about the gender of a business leader.

"I hope there comes a day when we're not talking about if it's a male or female thing, or if it's a minority thing," she said. "What you should really look for is who is the best fit for the job, period."