

**TCW**  
TODAY'S  
CHICAGO  
WOMAN

TODAY'S CHICAGO WOMAN AUGUST 2007

SMART WOMEN. SMART READ.

LIVING  
**GREEN**

41

WAYS TO  
ESCAPE  
THIS SUMMER



LYNN  
McMAHAN

**PLUS**  
ALYSIA TATE  
RICHARD MELMAN  
CHANGE YOUR CAREER  
TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENTS

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# 8/07 contents today's chicago woman

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Smart Women. Smart Read.



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Lynn McMahan, photo by Elizabeth Jochum. Cafe stop on an Urban Shop Guide tour ([www.UrbanShopGuide.com](http://www.UrbanShopGuide.com)), photo courtesy of Urban Shop Guide. Kathryn McKechnie, photo by Barb Levant. Pens, photo by Stuart-Rodgers Photography. Girl carrying books, photo from [www.photos.com](http://www.photos.com).

### COVER CREDITS

Lynn McMahan, photo by Elizabeth Jochum, [www.elizabethjochum.com](http://www.elizabethjochum.com), [elizabeth@elizabethjochum.com](mailto:elizabeth@elizabethjochum.com). Styling by Nicole Stege; Makeup/hair by Morgan.

# CAREER RE-DO

We all toy with the idea of switching careers, doing something completely different and new. But how many of us have the guts to quit our jobs and pursue our professional passions? Meet three women who did just that, and they'll tell you how you can do it too...

*By Megan Handley | Photos by Barb Levant*

## FINANCIAL CONSULTANT TO FASHION DIVA

After graduating with high honors from the University of Illinois in 1997, Kathryn McKechnie, 32, embarked on a lucrative career in the finance industry, first as a credit analyst for a Chicago banking corporation and later as a consultant for a financial management group. After bouncing around to various local companies trying to find the right fit for her qualifications and professional goals, Kathryn says, "I came to the conclusion that I was tired of being a support person and started thinking about what I really wanted to do."

Fascinated by the fashion industry since she can remember, Kathryn found her ultimate inspiration doing something she loves: shopping on Michigan Avenue. "I not only have a figure that is challenging to dress, I also have wide feet that don't like to fit into medium shoes!" she laments. This all-too-familiar predicament found Kathryn in a perpetual search for comfortable but attractive shoes and pitted against designers who ignore the fact that only 4 percent of women have ideal figures. "I ended up trying on a pair of Taryn Rose shoes. The shoes fit and I had been looking for so long that the price tag seemed a little easier to swallow. They are still the most expensive shoes I have ever purchased but I was impressed by the fact that an orthopedic surgeon had started the shoe company instead of going into private practice after completing her residency," Kathryn explains.

After a particularly disappointing stint in another support finance staff position and earning only "meets expectations" on her job review, Kathryn decided, "It was time to do something about my dream. I don't do 'meets expectations,' I set very high standards for myself and 'meets expectations' was the slap in the face I needed to get going on my dream."

To jumpstart her new endeavor into the fashion industry, Kathryn enrolled in the Illinois Institute of Art for Fashion Marketing and Management. "I really liked it," Kathryn says, "but at the rate of one class a quarter, I knew I would never finish." With the support of her husband and family, Kathryn reduced her hours as a financial consultant and squeezed a full-time student schedule into a two-day time slot. Kathryn admits there were considerable challenges but she overcame them with the moral support of her husband and adhering to a fitness program.

"It was busy working three days a week and going to school two days a week. Luckily, the program wasn't nearly as rigorous as a major university, so I still had part of a life!" she says. Eventually, burned out by the constant demands on her time and energy from work and school, Kathryn quit her job in order to more fully pursue her fashion career. "I quit my job and haven't regretted it a bit. I cook more and go out to eat less and have found that cooking is another one of my passions," she says.

As Kathryn continues to pursue her dream of designing a fashion line for full-figured women, she experiences apprehensions and doubts. "Sometimes all of the things I need to accomplish seem overwhelming," she admits, "but in my heart, I know my clothing line for curvier women is going to be a success."

Although Kathryn enjoyed a higher salary as a financial consultant, she continues to forge ahead with her new career. "I finally realized that I need to be doing something I love, not something that gets that direct deposit into my bank account," she says. "Follow your passion. You are never too old to go for it! You are never locked into your career. It doesn't matter how much money you make doing it, if you don't love it, you won't want to get out of bed to do it every day."



(above) Kathryn McKechnie who says, "It doesn't matter how much money you make doing it, if you don't love it, you won't want to get out of bed to do it every day." (top right) Mary Ellen Christian. (bottom right) Connie Fairbanks.