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Section 3

The Executive Life/Deborah L. Jacobs

# At the Beck and Call Of the Overbooked

**R**ODNEY VANAUSDAL was on his way from Chicago to the Kentucky Derby with three friends when their rented motor home broke down, leaving them stranded in Rensselaer, Ind. Under the circumstances, most executives would have hoped for an able mechanic to arrive on the scene. Mr. VanAusdal, a lawyer with Williams & Montgomery in Chicago, called his corporate concierge.

His what?

Mr. VanAusdal's trouble-shooter of choice was Olga Pierce, a former hotel concierge in Chicago who formed her own company, Concierge Unlimited, in the mid-1980's, offering a range of services to busy executives. By the time she received the SOS from Mr. VanAusdal, he and his buddies had taken the disabled motor home to a local garage and found a rental car to drive the rest of the way to Louisville. But they had no place to stay once they arrived there. So Ms. Pierce took over and, although the city was booked, she found them two rooms at a Ramada Inn.

Another client, Steve LaGattuta, president and chief executive of the advertising agency BBDO Chicago, recently asked Ms. Pierce to find the city's best chicken soup and order a healthy helping delivered to a client with a terrible cold. "Often you have an idea for something you know is doable, but you also know is going to take time and some digging to get done," said Mr. LaGattuta. Rather than have secretaries put aside

other responsibilities, BBDO Chicago pays a yearly retainer to Concierge Unlimited to be on call for the occasional time-consuming or unusual assignment.

With companies trimming their support staffs, more and more executives are looking outside their work forces for services once handled by secretaries and administrative assistants. And a growing number — no one knows quite how many — of corporate concierges have been setting up shop to fill the need. With desks in the lobbies of large office buildings or just a phone call away, they have helped with everything from briefcase repairs to marriage proposals to digging up 50 Washington Redskins sweatshirts on short notice (a law firm wanted them for a Japanese client).

Travis Julian, a vice president with Compass Management and Leasing in Chicago, was recently looking for a houndstooth check hat for his father. After his own shopping trip failed, Mr. Julian called Ms.

### Corporate concierges are in vogue for chores that would test a secretary's patience.

Pierce, who tracked one down at Harrod's in London and arranged for it to be sent to Mr. Julian's father in time for Christmas.

While it is mostly high-level executives who have access to corporate concierges, Sun Microsystems, the Mountain View, Calif.-based computer manufacturer, last year began offering the perk to its 7,000 Bay Area employees.

... In today's hotly competitive commercial real-estate market, building owners or managing agents are luring tenants by putting a concierge desk in the building lobby . . .



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