

# INNOVATIVE ENTERPRISE

BY BOB SKIPPER

**IN THE CORNER OF LINDA JOHNSON'S OFFICE, AMID THE 42-INCH FLAT PLASMA WALL MONITOR AND THE TWO COMPUTERS, SITS AN OLD ROYAL MANUAL TYPEWRITER. AS SHE TALKS ABOUT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP, HER 6-YEAR-OLD SON WILL TRIES TO "LOAD" A SHEET OF PAPER INTO THE TYPEWRITER.**

"Isn't that amazing," Dr. Johnson says as she inserts the paper into the rollers at the top. "He's only seen a computer printer before."

While Will has trouble adapting to the older technology, his mother's mission is just the opposite — trying to help more Kentuckians use information technology to their advantage.

As president of CITE — the Center for Information Technology Enterprise — and a member of the Department of Management and Information Systems faculty at Western Kentucky University, Dr. Johnson remains in the forefront of Kentucky's move into the "new economy."

Although she has published and lectured nationally and internationally, her interests are somewhat surprising.



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

"I have a passion for computer literacy," she said. When she joined the Western faculty in 1991, she saw "a tremendous need for basic computer skills among the students at Western, among individuals in our region, and throughout Kentucky. I was really challenged by the fact that in the early 1990s we continued to lose faculty positions from our information technology program, and as a result of that, I participated with my colleagues in creating a number of innovative ways to teach computer literacy. We were one of the first programs in the country to develop a self-paced, Web-based, competency-based approach to computer literacy."

That type of forward thinking is what characterizes the information systems faculty in Western's Gordon Ford College of Business, Dr. Johnson said. "I have been fortunate to lead a very entrepreneurial and innovative faculty for the past several years," she added. Prior to becoming president of CITE, Johnson served as professor and chair of Information Systems, WKU's fastest growing undergraduate program. While she was chair (1996-2001), the program grew from 125 to 285 students.

"Information technology is a very practice-driven field because it is relatively new," Dr. Johnson said. "I've always had a tremendous interest in tying together the practice of information technology strategy and policy, my focus area, with what's going on in the classroom."

As the information systems faculty began integrating technology into the classroom, they also attracted attention from business and industry. "Businesses needed advice, and they would call us," she said. "The faculty talked about how we might help, and we came up with the idea of creating a company — and that company is now becoming quite successful."

CITE ([www.citeinc.com](http://www.citeinc.com)), a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) company, with headquarters at 1711 Destiny Place in Bowling Green, now has six full-time employees and plans to double its space this year.

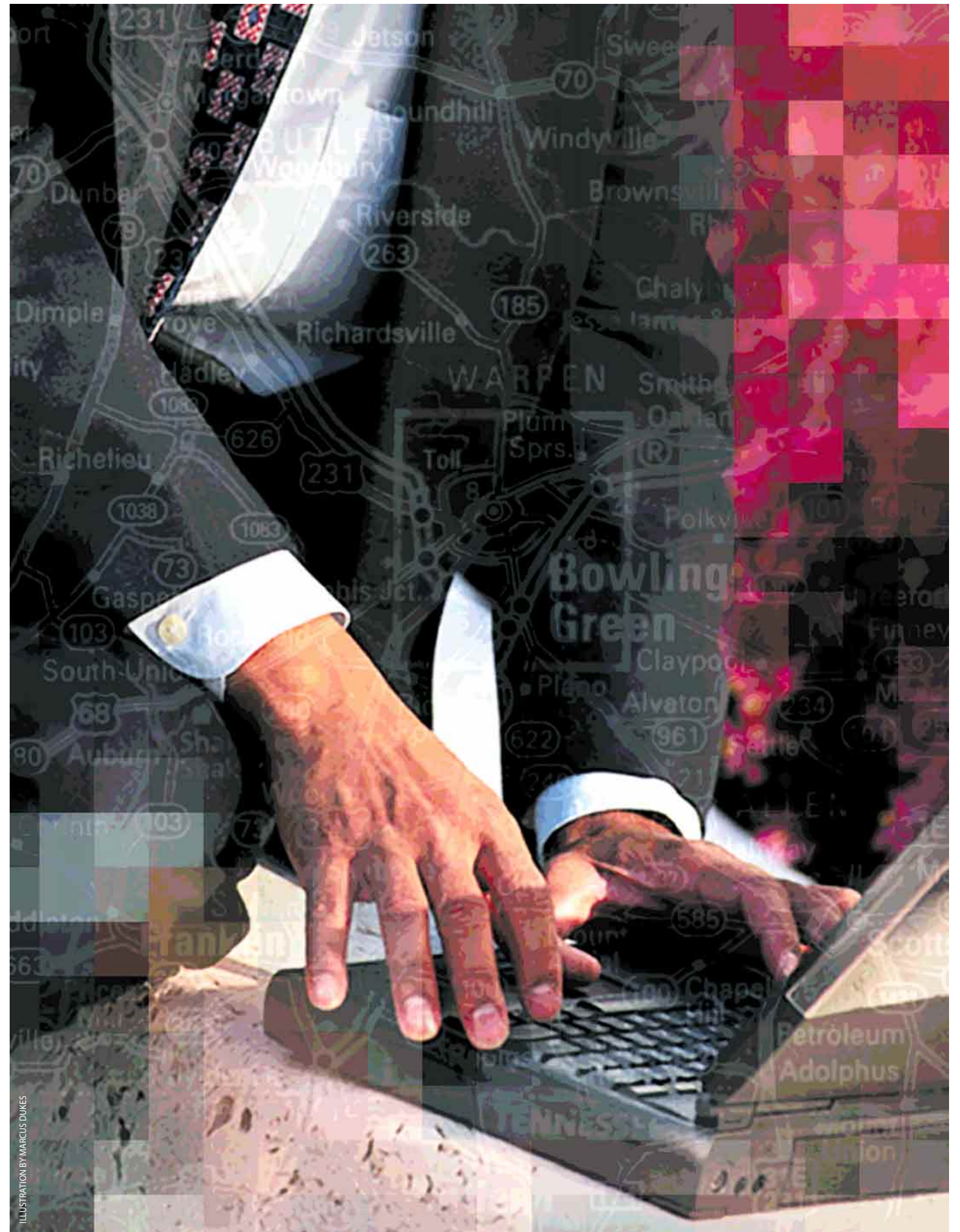


ILLUSTRATION BY MARCUS DUKES

"CITE is not technically affiliated with the University, yet it certainly owes its existence to Western Kentucky University's Foundation and WKU President, Gary Ransdell," Dr. Johnson said. "This is just another outgrowth of a university committed to economic development and involvement with a group of professionals who are out-of-the-box thinkers. That's why we choose to be faculty: because we like the intellectual freedom to try new ideas."

The initiative that Dr. Johnson and her coworkers used to move the Information Systems program ahead is also being applied to business and industry.

"What really excites me, and what I have enjoyed most about creating a

company and serving as CITE's first president, is the ability to help companies develop ways to compete in the new economy. We assist 'old economy' companies transition their existing business practices to 'new economy' processes," she said. "More than 80 percent of Kentucky's businesses are small businesses. Unless we can help them be competitive in today's global economy, Kentucky is going to struggle economically. Creating a strategic advantage through information technology is what we do at CITE."

CITE also brings government into the equation. One of the first major projects Dr. Johnson landed was from the Governor's Office for the New Economy to spearhead *connect-*

*kentucky* ([www.connectkentucky.org](http://www.connectkentucky.org)). Launched by Governor Paul Patton in the Capitol Rotunda in May, this three-year, \$2.65 million, public-private partnership takes a look at the information superhighway in Kentucky — its condition, accessibility, and who's using it. The Steering Committee includes representation from ALLTEL, Ashland Inc., Band One, Belcan, BellSouth, Cincinnati Bell, CSX, Humana, Nortel, Qwest, Scotty's Development, Toyota, UPS, USEC, and Yum! Brands.

"We have basically mapped the highway, which is one big fast lane running from Cincinnati through Louisville to Nashville and on to Atlanta, as you might expect, based on where the global Internet



Dr. Linda Johnson, President of CITE

PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

must be faced to stay on the cutting edge. She has found that while it is somewhat easy to create a business, finding the knowledge workers to staff the business is her greatest challenge.

She cites Dr. Bill Brundage, Kentucky's New Economy commissioner, who says, "The new economy is about blurring the lines between higher education, government, and industry."

"CITE is that blur, because it's a group of academicians who are working with business people and with government constituencies, and we bring all of those parties to the table together," she said.

One accomplishment of which Dr. Johnson is most proud is that of receiving the first Don and Suzanne Vitale Award for Initiative, Innovation, and Leadership, established in 1999 by Don Vitale, president of Manchester Capital in Bowling Green. "It is such an honor as an academician to be recognized by business people for our professional accomplishment. Two information systems faculty have received this award and it says a lot about the

**'More than 80 percent of Kentucky's businesses are small businesses. Unless we can help them be competitive in today's global economy, Kentucky is going to struggle economically.'**



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

commodity is located," she said. Now, CITE is using Geographic Information System maps to assess the availability of high-speed on-ramps like DSL and cable modems. The information stored in a database will help Kentucky compete in the networked world of e-commerce.

"This is really important to economic developers, because if you're trying to get businesses to locate in your area, they need access, high-speed on ramps to the Internet. You need to be able to get to this kind of information," Dr. Johnson said.

While T1 lines offer quick access, the \$600-\$800 monthly fee is more than most businesses can afford. DSL and cable modems are more affordable, running about \$35 monthly for homes and \$100 for businesses.

CITE is using a national model to conduct the *connectkentucky* research in addition to implementing the Web site [www.connectkentucky.org](http://www.connectkentucky.org). "We are responsible for the entire project and are collaborating with the Ohio Supercomputing Center to make this a reality," she said.

CITE also offers video conferencing from its office in Bowling Green. Dr. Johnson indicated some clients use the technology to cut back on travel costs and time away from the State.

Even though she spends much of her time traveling on behalf of *connectkentucky* and CITE, numerous challenges

people with whom I have the pleasure of working," she said.

Vitale, who assisted greatly with bringing CITE's concept to fruition, is on the company's Board of Directors; he is a major proponent of Western Kentucky University's role in economic development.

"Innovation is the fuel for knowledge-based enterprises," Vitale said. "Great universities contribute to economic development by being the source of this fuel."

Other board members who provide leadership and direction for CITE are Dr. Robert Jefferson, Dean of the Gordon Ford College of Business; Ann Mead, WKU Chief Financial Officer; Dan Cherry, former President, ITA; Margaret Grissom, President, Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce; and H. B. Clark, Regional Manager, BellSouth.

With Western as the fuel and CITE the engine carrying Kentucky into the new economy, Dr. Johnson continues to look for more drivers, often turning to WKU. Some of those drivers take the form of faculty consultants, student interns, graduate students, and retired faculty. The *connectkentucky* initiative is a major catalyst for placing Kentucky among the top states equipped with information technology in the networked world.

"We like to hire our graduates and we like to keep smart people here with us," she said.