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Ted Vickey is “In Charge” at The White House

Ever since he was a young boy growing up in Erie, Pennsylvania, Ted Vickey '91 EX SCI dreamed of someday becoming president and working in The White House. Today, after a lot of hard work and with the help of some important people along the way, he is just one of a handful of people who can say he made that dream come true.

Well, sort of...

Ted is president of FitWell Associates Inc., a fitness management company that designs and operates fitness facilities and has created health and fitness programs for a variety of large companies in the eastern United States and several federal government agencies. However, FitWell's first client remains perhaps its most prestigious—since 1987, the company has operated The White House Athletic Center.

Yes, that White House.

Ironically, Ted's childhood dream was to get into politics and eventually become President of the United States. “I used to tell my grandmother all the time that I was going to live in the White House someday,” he recalls. So, when Ted came to Penn State in the summer of 1987, it came as no surprise to his friends and family that he planned to major in political science.

Those plans changed that October after Ted broke his ankle playing a game of pick-up football on one of his first trips home from college. “I remember going through my rehab and being



Ted Vickey

fascinated with the thought of helping people get healthy and stay fit,” he says. “That’s when I decided to change majors.”

Although no longer destined to become President of the United States, Ted's dream of working at The White House was about to come true. While completing his undergraduate degree, Ted was one of only a handful of students in the country selected to

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Ted Vickey

(continued from previous page)

serve an internship at The White House Athletic Center. The first time I walked in there, I was on cloud nine," he admits.

But that was just the beginning. In 1994, Ted was working in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's fitness facility when he received a phone call from Denise Terry-Evans, the person who owned the company that ran The White House Athletic Center and had hired him to work there.

"She told me that she was leaving and wanted to know if I might be interested in buying the company," he says. Here I am, only 24 years old—I had no idea what I should do."

That is when Ted called Dr. Bob Ricketts, currently senior lecturer in kinesiology and head of the department's undergraduate program, for some advice. "I called Bob and said I have this opportunity to buy this company but wasn't sure what I should do. He asked me how much it was going to cost, and I told him. Bob gave me a lot of advice. He also wrote the check and told me to pay him back when I could, which I did over the next five years. So, by Christmas 1994 I started the process of buying the company.

Unfortunately, Ted's excitement of buying the company was tempered by his grandmother's failing health. He remembers his last trip to visit his grandmother in June 1995. "She had been in and out of a coma, but when I got there she woke up and we talked. She told me she would always be my guardian angel.

On July 27, 1995, the day Ted closed on the sale, he received a plant from his grandmother with a note attached. "Congratulations, you've reached your dream," it read. "You're now a president in The White House."

"I called my aunt later that day to tell her I had signed the papers, Ted says. "Two hours after she told my grandmother the news, my grandmother passed away. That's when I decided that, with my

grandmother—my guardian angel—always watching over me, I'm going for it."

That philosophy has served Ted well—in the seven years since purchasing the company, FitWell has built a fitness center for Fruit of the Loom in Kentucky and operates fitness facilities for OSRAM Sylvania and Eastern Mountain Sports in New Hampshire. In Washington, FitWell manages a facility and provides services to the Securities and Exchange Commission in addition to maintaining The White House Athletic Center. Most recently, the company received a government contract to conduct fitness evaluations on 100,000 federal employees nationwide. FitWell currently employs 15 full-time and more than 150 part-time employees.

Two years ago, Ted sold FitWell to Comprehensive Health Services Inc. (CHS). Based in Vienna, Virginia, CHS is one of the national leaders in managing and administering occupational health programs and boasts a network of 10,000 physicians in 6,000 locations throughout the United States. Clients include 30 Fortune 200 firms and several federal government agencies. Ted is still president of FitWell and was named a vice president of CHS after selling the company.

Ted admits that the past seven years have sometimes been a blur. "I was never a twenty-something person," he says. "I had to grow up pretty quickly and learn how to run a business, and I had to do it under The White House microscope."

However, Ted also says he is pleased with the choices he has made along the way. "I love what I'm doing and I love helping people—there are times I even forget that my office is at The White House."

And what about that aspiring political career? "People assumed I was a Democrat when Clinton was President, and people assume now that I'm a Republican because Bush is there, but I try to keep politics separate from the facility. I do know one thing for sure, though—I definitely wouldn't want to be in politics." ■