

People

In The News

Georgia Watch's Phelps builds legacy of service

By Dave Williams

STAFF WRITER

At first blush, it might seem that Angela Speir Phelps made a radical career change this year when she moved from utility regulator to consumer advocate.

But Phelps' track record on Georgia's Public Service Commission, or PSC, tells a different story.

After six years casting votes on the side of consumers — often on the losing side — Phelps took a job last January with Georgia Watch, the state's leading consumer advocacy organization, and moved up to executive director in July.

Now, she spends her days butting heads with her former PSC colleagues from the other side of the dais.

"I had served my tour of duty," she said during an interview in her downtown Atlanta office late last month. "I could either keep on or seek another way to serve the state. There's more than one way to skin a cat."

Phelps, 42, of Duluth, comes by politics naturally. Her parents were politically active in Republican circles in her native DeKalb County, and she grew up

campaigning for Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

That early activism moved her at the age of 24 to seek a DeKalb-based state Senate seat, an uphill bid that ended in defeat.

Despite moving on to become the manager of an international staffing company, Phelps didn't lose her taste for politics and, more importantly, what elective office could mean: an opportunity to serve others.

When she took time off from her job to care for her seriously ill father, she said she had time to think.

"To me, politics is public service," she said. "None of us knows how much time we have here. It means every day I do my best to get out and get after it, and that means helping people."

What emerged from Phelps' self-search was a decision to run for the PSC.

She faced huge obstacles in incumbent Democrat Lauren "Bubba" McDonald in what then was still a Democratic-leaning state coupled with her own lack of name recognition.

"I met with one of the top Republican consultants in our state," she said. "He said, 'Angela, if you don't have at least a

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

ANGELA SPEIR PHELPS

Current job:

Executive director, Georgia Watch

Previous job: Member, Georgia Public Service Commission, 2003-2009

Age: 42

Born: DeKalb County

Lives: Duluth

Education: Bachelor's degree in biology, Agnes Scott College

Family: Husband, Michael



BYRON E. SMALL

ACCOUNTING

• Habif, Arogeti & Wynne LLP appointed **Michael I. Levy** director of merger and acquisition services.



Pryor

• Cherry, Bekaert & Holland LLP promoted **Patricia L. Pryor** to audit partner. Pryor will lead the specialized audit services for the firm's local not-for-profit, higher education and government clients.

ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING



Connell

• Ai Group Design LLC appointed **Jeffrey S. Connell** director of its ecclesiastical studio.

• ASD added **Kristine Huber** to the interiors team. **Jason Diaz** joined the firm as a designer.

• sky design added **Rachel Anscher** as graphic designer. Anscher

specializes on projects ranging from environmental graphics to corporate branding.

ARTS & NONPROFIT

• **Stuart Williams**, vice president of industry relations for Fiserv Inc., was elected vice chairman of NACHA's Council for Electronic Billing and Payments.

• Atlanta music industry gurus **Tammy Hurt** and **Elizabeth Elkins** launched Placement Music.

BANKING & FINANCE



Halberg

• BNY Mellon Wealth Management named wealth strategist **Dana Halberg** chairman of BNY Mellon Wealth Management in Georgia to reflect her role in increasing the company's community involvement and expanding its presence in the state. Halberg also will continue with her senior client, portfolio manager and team leader responsibilities.

• Morgan Keegan & Company Inc. promoted the following Atlanta-based employees to

first vice president: **Jim Chester**, investment banker; **Doug Crenshaw**, financial adviser; **Joel Foster**, fixed-income sales; **Jeremy Loyd**, fixed-income sales; **David Mann**, fixed-income sales; **Mark Satsky**, investment banker; **Palmer Scarritt**, financial adviser; and **Vicki Smart**, branch administrative officer. The following Atlanta-based employees were promoted to senior vice president: **Kyle Davis**, financial adviser; **Randy MacNeill**, financial adviser; **John McHale**, financial adviser; and **My Edmonds**, wealth management services.

• RBC Bank appointed **Heather Allen** senior relationship manager of commercial markets. In this new role, Allen will oversee commercial clients in the metro Atlanta area with revenues exceeding \$75 million.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

• DeKalb Convention & Visitors Bureau added eight new members to the board of directors: DeKalb County Sheriff **Thomas Brown**; **Gene Calloway**, general manager of Holiday Inn Select Atlanta Perimeter; **Nalin Patel**, general manager of Holiday Inn Atlanta Northeast Doraville; **Neel Patel**, owner and general manager of Hilton Garden Inn Atlanta East Stonecrest; **Patrick Putman**, senior vice president and director of business development

for Resurgens Bank; **Steve Spiegel**, development partner for Hendon Properties; **Jim Sprouse**, executive director of the Georgia Hotel and Lodging Association; and **Ron Wolfe**, CEO of the Georgia Restaurant Association.

• The National Association of Catering Executives elected **Stacy Zeigler**, director of sales for Bold American Catering, first vice president of the board of directors.

• **Raymond B. King**, senior vice president for community affairs for SunTrust Banks Inc., was elected 2010-2011 chair of the Fernbank Museum of Natural History board of trustees. **Dorothy Smith Hines**, a former Fundraising executive and former leader of Fernbank's Artemis guild of young professionals, was named secretary; and **Ronald B. Bobo**, president of Pinehill Investments, will serve as treasurer. **Johnella Butler**, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Spelman College, and **Drew Atkinson Putt**, RBC Bank president of commercial markets, were also added to the board of trustees.

• Children Without A Voice USA appointed **Dr. Jordan Greenbaum**, medical director for Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's Child Protection Center, to its board of directors as executive secretary.

EDUCATION



Garrick

• University of Phoenix - Atlanta promoted **Bruce Garrick** to corporate education liaison director. Garrick's new role will focus on expanding the university's community presence in the Atlanta metro area and overseeing 16 corporate education liaisons in the area. **Bruce Smith** was promoted to director of finance. Smith's new role encompasses developing, implementing and communicating financial and accounting policies and procedures for the university's six locations in the Atlanta area. He will also guide staff to ensure high student satisfaction.

GOVERNMENT



Comer

• Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle appointed **Holly Comer** to serve on the Commission on Women. Comer is

the CEO and executive director of the YWCA of Northwest Georgia.



Verner

• Gov. Sonny Perdue added Georgia EMC Vice President **Bill Verner** to the newly formed Complete Count Committee, a commission that will educate and coordinate community awareness and action for the upcoming 2010 U.S. Census.

HEALTH CARE



Dwyer

• Emory Eastside Medical Center named **Nancy A. Dwyer** vice president of human resources. Dwyer will be responsible for all human resources operations for both campuses, Emory Eastside and the Heritage Center.

• **Kirkland "Kirk" McGhee** joined Kaiser Permanente Inc.'s Georgia region as vice president and regional counsel. In



McGhee

this capacity, McGhee coordinates and provides legal services to the Georgia region, working closely with other members of the legal division. McGhee also is a member of the region's senior leadership team and has responsibilities for government relations.

HOSPITALITY



Harrison

• **Mike Harrison** joined the Atlanta Hawks, Atlanta Thrashers and Philips Arena as manager of corporate partnerships.

• **Allison Fillmore** joined the Atlanta Motor Speedway sales staff as a corporate sales executive. Fillmore will be working with the corporate sponsorship team in developing new partnerships for Atlanta Motor Speedway. In addition, she will assist

with block ticket sales and growing track hospitality opportunities, among other projects.

• Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen appointed **Alice LeBlanc** to chief supply chain and QA/commercialization officer. **Colista Yates** was named vice president of QA and commercialization.

INSURANCE



Williams

• Broadspire named **Kevin Williams** senior vice president and director of analytics. Williams will be responsible for building on current models and developing new metrics for client benchmarking reports, book of business report cards and stewardship reports, including evolving both client and internal analytics in the occupational and non-occupational arenas.

LAW

• Taylor English Duma LLP added **Valerie Richmond** to the firm as a member of the firm's bankruptcy and creditors' rights practice group where she represents national and regional banks and other financial institutions

quarter of a million dollars to fund this campaign, forget it.'"

Phelps said she heard that advice, then ignored it.

It helped that 2002 turned out to be a Republican year in Georgia. Starting at the top of the ticket with gubernatorial challenger Sonny Perdue and U.S. Senate underdog Saxby Chambliss, GOP candidates picked up or retained statewide offices up and down the ballot.

Still, political insiders considered it a near-miracle that an unknown like Phelps could win a PSC race while spending little money and going without any contributions from the utility lobbyists who typically finance commission candidates.

"It was a shoe-leather campaign," she said. "A lot of people I had campaigned for and with rallied [stood] behind me."

Taking office in January 2003, Phelps became a reliable ally of longtime Commissioner Bobby Baker in a series of pro-consumer votes that usually went 3-2 against the duo.

Examples over the years included their "no" votes in rate cases and fuel-charge requests involving **Georgia Power Co.**, a failed effort to impose a three-day ban on power shutoffs during heat waves, an unsuccessful bid to delay a liquefied natural gas pipeline that consumer groups opposed, and their opposition to letting **AT&T Inc.** and **BellSouth Corp.** merge without imposing any conditions.

But Phelps prevailed in 2007 in convincing four of five PSC members to approve an "ex parte" rule limiting commissioners' closed-door conversations with representatives of utilities and other companies with business before the commission.

Phelps said shortly after she took office, she heard complaints that a lawyer had written a settlement proposal in a case

before the PSC and e-mailed it to a commissioner minutes before it was approved.

"When I got elected, the staff was still talking about this and how horrible it was," she said. "That kind of deal-making behind closed doors should never happen."

But those victories were few and far between, and Phelps acknowledged feeling some frustration over constantly losing to what she saw as a pro-utility commission majority.

However, she said that's not what drove her to announce in the spring of last year that she wouldn't run for a second term.

She said it was the same sense of the finite nature of life that led her to want to do something else.

Phelps didn't have anything definite lined up until last December, a month after McDonald, now a Republican, had won his old seat back.

Phelps said she was approached by Allison Wall, executive director of Georgia Watch, to head up a newly created consumer energy program. She jumped at the chance.

"Founding a consumer energy program gave me an opportunity to work on issues I'd known," she said.

Then, just six months after Phelps joined Georgia Watch, Wall left for a job with the Georgia Conservancy, and Phelps was promoted to executive director.

"The whole thing has been the right place at the right time," Wall said. "I just think she's doing a fabulous job."

While Phelps came aboard primarily as an expert on energy, she said she has been a quick study on other issues in Georgia Watch's orbit, including identity theft, health care and mortgage reform.

"If I can discern a \$1 billion rate case, depreciation rates and nuclear proceedings, I can figure out what needs to get done here at Georgia Watch," she said.

Mark Woodall, legislative chairman for the Georgia chapter of the Sierra Club, said Phelps has been a welcome addition to the advocacy community.

"Historically, the PSC hasn't been pro-consumer at all," he said. "Consumers need all the help they can get."

Now, Phelps is wearing two hats at Georgia Watch. Along with running the organization, she continues to serve as senior director of the consumer energy program.

It's in that role that she's gearing up for next year's challenges, including Georgia Power and Atlanta Gas Light Co. rate cases due to go before the PSC.

"I've been fighting the good fight for years," she said. "I don't intend to let up in any shape or form."

Reach Williams at davewilliams@bizjournals.com.

If you know an executive whose hobby — or day job — is unusual enough to be in print, contact Thornton Kennedy at thorntonkennedy@bizjournals.com.

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ACHIEVEMENTS

Fisher & Phillips LLP received first place honors for Business Development Initiative from the Legal Marketing Association Southeast chapter for the firm's legal educational program "This Year, We're Bringing It to Yousm."

Allstate agent **Terry Mechling** earned the Personal Financial Representative title. Mechling will now be able to provide his customers variable annuity, variable life and mutual fund products, in addition to auto, homeowner and traditional life insurance products.

Morgan Stanley Smith Barney financial adviser **G. Charles "Chuck" Kennedy Jr.** received the professional designation of Certified



Jan-Pro Cleaning Systems was recognized with numerous awards at the company's national conference. In addition to being the largest annual billing office in the country, **Brad Rush**, second from left, was awarded the Leadership Award and was recognized with the company's Service Award for 2009.

Portfolio Manager from the Industrial Engineering and Operations Research Department of Columbia University.

The Cobb-Marietta Coliseum & Exhibit Hall Authority was

awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. The Authority,

which governs Cobb Galleria Centre, Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre and Galleria Specialty Shops, won the award for its comprehensive annual financial report.



Richmond

inside and outside of Bankruptcy Court, as well as Creditors' Committees and other non-debtor entities in a wide variety of bankruptcy matters. Her work routinely includes preference and fraudulent transfer avoidance actions, turnover actions, and other bankruptcy disputes and litigation.

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS



Huynh

Turner Broadcasting System Inc. promoted **Hieu N. Huynh** to writer and producer for CNN's "Larry King Live." Huynh will develop and produce on-air promotions for the show.

REAL ESTATE

Prudential Georgia Realty added **Robert Burch** to the sales team of the Fayetteville office.



Scranage

Harry Norman, Realtors added **Cheri Scranage** as a sales associate in its Peachtree City office.

David Clappier joined Richard Bowers & Co. as senior vice president of its brokerage and development division. In this role, Clappier will be working with RBC and its support firms in brokerage, obtaining financing and other real estate endeavors.



Smith

K. Lee Smith joined the Keller Williams Realty team in the Peachtree Battle Market Center.

TECHNOLOGY

Jennifer Mims was named account manager for OneMedia. Mims oversees the sale and management of OneMedia Smart Interactive System, a digital kiosk product.



Opler

Carlton Fields Atlanta shareholder **Stephen A. Opler** was selected for Georgia Trend magazine's 2009 Georgia Legal Elite in the area of Business Law. Georgia Legal Elite are attorneys selected by their peers as the most effective in their area of practice.

Carol Tomé, chief financial officer and executive vice president of The Home Depot Inc., was named 2009 CFO of the Year by The CFO Roundtable.



Wimberly

Dr. Yolanda Wimberly, an expert in adolescent health focused on sexually transmitted diseases, reproductive health and human sexuality at Morehouse School of Medicine, was selected for inclusion in Ebony magazine's first-ever "Power 150" list.



Diaz



Kasten

Junior Achievement of Georgia inducted **René Diaz**, president and CEO of Diaz Foods, and **Stan Kasten**, president of the Washington Nationals and former president of the Atlanta Braves, into the Junior Achievement Atlanta Business Hall of Fame.

U.S. Green Building Council awarded Silver LEED for Commercial Interiors (LEED-CI) Certification to **Lord, Aeck & Sargent Inc.** for its recent Atlanta office expansion that features certified carbon neutral building products, automated daylight harvesting lighting controls, and EnergyStar-rated office equipment.

Wendy Thompson, a representative with the Callaway Black Group of Northwestern Mutual Financial Network, received her Chartered Financial Consultant designation.