



STEVE WILSON | TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL
New Avantt consultants, from left, Mark Brady, Karen Hammond-Smith, Bill Francis and Lynn Russell.

Local business execs join up to open N.Y. firm's area shop

By Amanda Jones

RALEIGH – A New York-based management consulting company focused on growth strategies has hired two former Triangle business executives and two consultants to expand its presence along the East Coast.

Bill Francis, former GTE/Verizon division general manager, and Mark Brady, former Liposcience chief commercial officer, have joined with business consultants Lynn Russell and Karen Hammond-Smith in establishing a base of operations for Avantt Consulting in North Carolina.

Avantt, headquartered in Corning, N.Y., pairs its principals with small and mid-size companies to implement strategic plans and identify internal factors that may be limiting a company's growth.

"Old consulting models are not working for folks," claims David Leis, president of Avantt. "All of our principals are accustomed to delivering measurable results."

Already, the four principals are working with Triangle companies in the life sciences, telecommunications, food production and government sectors.

"These guys are deep in experience as opposed to many consulting groups that will take a newly minted MBA and teach them to be consultants," says Jeff Clark, a managing general partner for the Aurora Funds in Durham. Aurora, a venture capital group, has hired Francis and Brady to assist its life science and technology clients.

"These guys ran the business," says Clark. "They came from the school of hard knocks. They've been there, done that, solved the problem. It's a different way of doing consulting."

Francis, who for 10 years was manager of division telephone operations in North Carolina, Arkansas and Oklahoma, was midway through his term as chairman of the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce in 1994 when GTE transferred him to its headquarters in Irving, Texas. There, he became director of vendor com-

pliance but returned to Durham last year following his retirement.

"Small and mid-size companies are beginning to utilize consultants more," Francis says. "The uniqueness of Avantt is we are not all things to all people. We are not here to solve all of your problems."

Russell, who has owned a construction company, an almond ranch and worked in transition management efforts at Disneyland in California, adds that the consultant's job is all about alignment.

"I am working with one company that has two shifts that don't talk to each other," she says. "They work at different times on different projects and use the same equipment, but they never communicate."

Hammond-Smith, who formerly held senior management positions at Accenture and PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting, says the perception is that every successful company

is up to date on its strategic plan. "That's not always true," she says. "One Fortune 500 company I've worked with had no management development plans or a succession plan. You make the assumption that it has those things, and they don't."

Brady, who has worked with Novartis Pharmaceuticals, Procter & Gamble and Ciba-Geigy, adds that the last two years have been challenging economic times for most companies.

"We anticipate that in '04 companies are getting ready to put plans in place," Brady says.

Avantt Consulting, which changed its name three years ago from Implementation Co., also has operations in Texas, New Jersey, Ohio, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Kansas. Leis says the company is interviewing potential consultants in Charlotte and Atlanta.

"One of the things we focus on when we do market research is finding the most attractive areas for business development, and Raleigh is right up there," Leis says. "Compared to other parts of the U.S., Raleigh is an attractive place to be."

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PRESIDENT, AVANTT CONSULTING

Avantt Consulting