

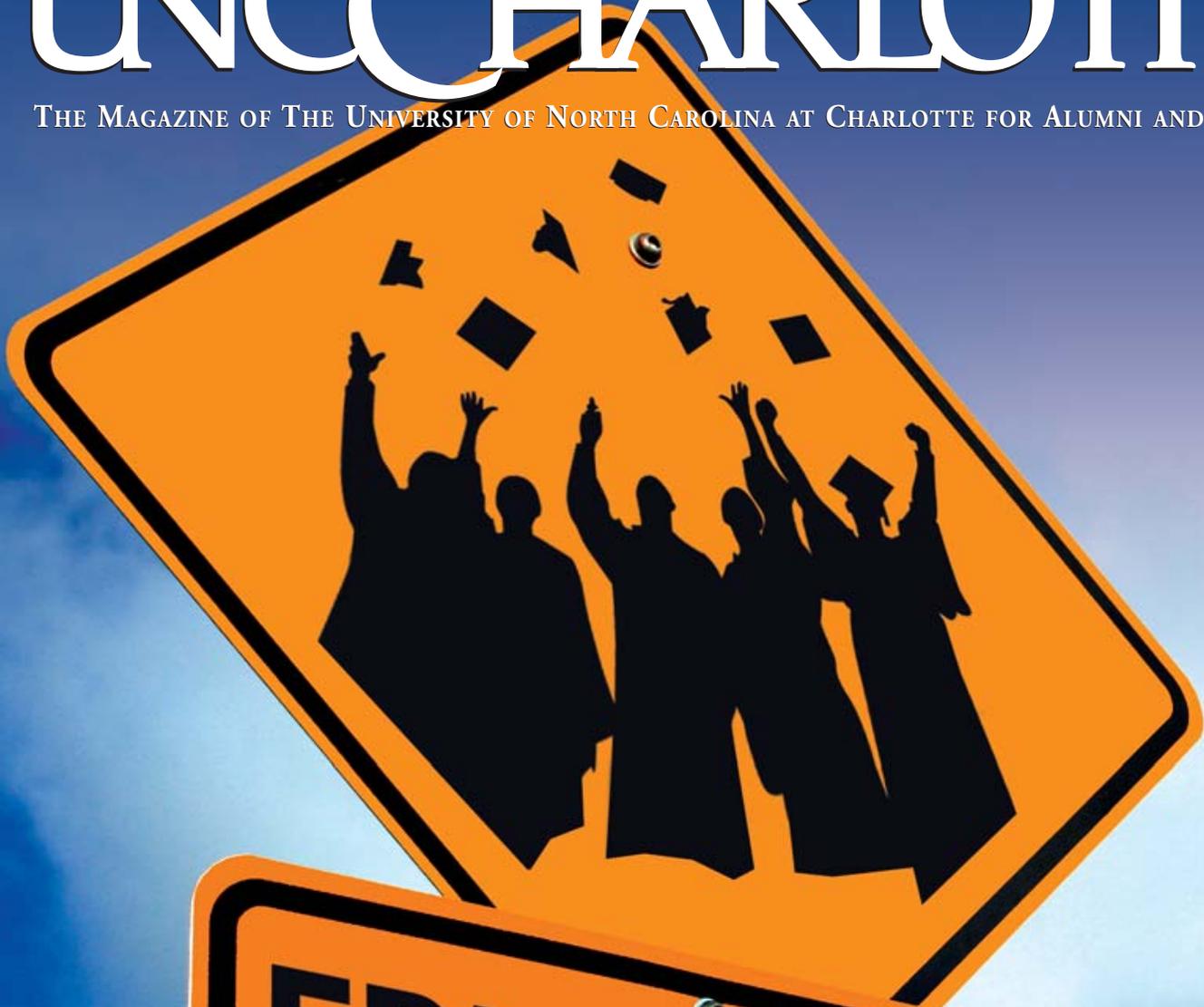
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*Teaching and
learning – a
lifelong journey*

Michelle Menard Finds More Than She Ever Imagined *By Fred Tannenbaum*

Michelle Menard discovered the world at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Now the language entrepreneur is bringing the globe to the Queen City.

She's grown Choice Translating Inc., her translating and interpreting business, from the kitchen table in her Central Avenue apartment to an office at Trade and Tryon streets in the heart of Charlotte's uptown and into Lima, Peru, 3,400 miles and another continent away.

"Make a difference: don't just go through the motions. That's very important to me."

Menard, 37, who graduated from UNC Charlotte in 1997 with a double major in French and international business, opened the Lima office in January 2007. Its functions include translating advertisements, catalogs and Web sites into many foreign languages. And the branch now has 13 employees, five more than the eight in the home office in Charlotte.

With her husband and business partner, Vernon J. Menard III, she has tightly woven the Peru office and its teammates into Choice Translating's operations. In a mere 14 months, the Lima operation has gone from being a satellite to being fully integrated.

Company-wide training is conducted from Peru via video hookup, for example. The Menards also have forged relationships with Lima-area universities to provide a pipeline of job candidates.

The move couldn't have come at a better time for Choice Translating. Peru's economy is growing. Its neighbor Brazil wants to use Peruvian ports to ship goods to Pacific Rim countries, and China wants to buy Peruvian minerals. The U.S. Government recently approved a free trade agreement with the South American nation.

When she visits Peru every two weeks, Menard says she feels comfortable in the office and sees the employees trying hard to quickly learn things and appreciating the opportunity. She proudly recounts how a Saturday-morning meeting to discuss new technology tools drew in employees outside that department.

"It's so much more than I ever imagined it would be," she said.

Choice Translating's growth is the result of honing its values, vision and culture, going through a sometimes-painful process searching and screening for the right people and letting go of those that weren't.

Through the firm's Web site and Web marketing, Choice Translating is picking up clients from beyond the Carolinas, including California and Tennessee.

Menard is savoring the success but with a healthy leavening of caution. "As entrepreneurs, we always see the need to improve," Menard said. "But I'm pinching myself and knocking on wood that things are good. Could we be that lucky?"

"As things get bigger and go faster, we have to be extra, extra careful about each decision."

Those who know Menard say the Choice Translating of today is simply an extension of the vision for the company she shared in the halls of UNC Charlotte 12 years ago.

Menard launched Choice Translating in 1995. She was a full-time UNC Charlotte student and waited tables at the Olive Garden restaurant on Independence Boulevard. There, her manager suggested Menard start her own language-translating company.

She often talked about the company with her instructors, including Alan Shao, professor of marketing and global business in the Belk College of Business at UNC Charlotte. It's common for graduate students to have ideas for a business but rare for undergraduates, he said.

"Michelle had a clear vision of what she wanted to do at such a young age," Shao said. "She saw that need."

Menard recalled her instructors weren't just going through the motions. "They were excited about what they did," she said. It's a quality she tries emulating at Choice Translating.

"Make a difference: don't just go through the motions. That's very important to me." Choice Translating's vision is "Change the world, one word at a time."

Menard hasn't been a stranger to campus since graduation. She recently was named to the Belk College's Business Advisory Council and is helping select a new dean of the college and establish an executive MBA program.

In February, she represented Choice Translating at a job fair held in the Cone University Center.

The students, she said, "were fearless." "They just walked right up to the booth and asked all kinds of questions. You can tell they feed off our excitement as well."

