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A Different Scale Of Impact

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For Ginger Rothrock '00, science and technology offer many reasons to be hopeful.

The news can be a depressing place when it comes to headlines about the health of the planet, but Rothrock gushes with positive energy when asked if technology can actually save a world under assault from human consumption.

"The data all say we are (destroying the planet), but I think there's a lot of hope in new technology, new science and hopefully new policies that will turn the tide," she says.

You couldn't be a "serial entrepreneur," as Rothrock is described in her company bio, without a bedrock of forward-thinking positivity, but being around cutting-edge ideas literally every day takes the pie-in-the-sky out of her optimism. Rothrock is a principal at HG Ventures, where she works to identify companies with innovations promising enough to warrant corporate investment and partnership.

Rothrock is bullish on the private sector playing a huge role in solving some of our biggest problems, because the new technology earning investment from the company wouldn't get that investment if there wasn't something to it. HG Ventures is an arm of The Heritage Group, which is a conglomerate of companies involved in highway construction and materials, environmental services, energy sales and marketing, and chemical refining. At first glance, that may seem like a sellout for someone whose first job after graduating from Furman with a chemistry degree was



'A DIFFERENT SCALE OF IMPACT'



Scientist-turned-venture-capitalist

Ginger Rothrock '00 explores life on the other side.

BY RON WAGNER '93

at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

But, in fact, it's just the opposite.

"Heritage Environmental is the largest private hazardous-waste collection and disposal environmental services firm in the country," she says. "Our portfolio and The Heritage Group company have just an incredible legacy of both innovation and entrepreneurship but also sustainability and really strong core values about improving the planet while being a profitable, sustainable business."

Rothrock had established herself as a successful scientist and entrepreneur in Cary,

North Carolina, when a colleague asked if she'd be interested in trying life on the other side as a venture capitalist. Realizing the potential, she couldn't say no – even if that meant leaving her role as vice president for technology and commercialization at RTI International, where she oversaw the commercialization of a \$1 billion portfolio of research and development at one of the world's largest contract research organizations.

"I just loved the entrepreneurial, new-tech side of things. I saw myself staying there and being the builder and doer of companies and products," Rothrock says. "It

never even occurred to me that I could be on the other side and be an enabler. It's just a different scale of impact."

Rothrock grew up in an entrepreneurial family and knew from a young age she wanted to get into science and be involved in change. A job in research with the EPA resulted in change, but not the way she expected.

"I started working in the government because I was into environmental issues and I thought that was the best way to make change," Rothrock says. "It was both a frustrating and enlightening experience because it was bureaucratic, hierarchical – kind of the opposite of the agile, innovative role that I wanted."

She made it a year before quitting to earn a Ph.D. in polymer and analytical chemistry from the University of North Carolina. After graduation she launched her first company, Liquidia Technologies, in collaboration with a professor. Taking a position as director of emerging technologies with RTI further scratched her innovation itch.

But even then, Rothrock was so focused on her tree she never considered the forest. Now that she has an aerial view at HG Ventures, however, where they partner with companies exploring everything from better electric car batteries to biodegradable lubricants and clothing to cleaning up persistent water micropollutants, there's no going back.

"The opportunity to work with scientific innovators at a scale much greater than I was is incredibly appealing," she says. ♦