

40

Under
Forty

2006

Kathy O'Donnell

AGE: 37

POSITION: Vice president and director of public affairs,
Citizens Bank of Rhode Island

RESIDENCE: South Kingstown

LIFELONG AMBITION: To define my own career path and do work that matters.

FAVORITE RESTAURANT: Twin Oaks

GUILTY PLEASURE: People magazine and 'American Idol'

Kathy O'Donnell is the youngest of six children, and had always wanted to strike her own path and prove herself, as her talented and successful siblings already had done. In her decade at Citizens Bank of Rhode Island, she's achieved just that.

After graduating from the University of Rhode Island, with a bachelor's degree in journalism and communications studies, O'Donnell began her career as an on-air reporter at WERI/WWRX Radio in Westerly. After 16 months there, she became a stringer for the Associated Press.

In January 1992, however, less than two years out of college, O'Donnell left journalism to become public relations assistant at The Groden Center in Providence. After five months there, she left for the Rhode Island office of the American Diabetes Association, where she was director of development for three and a half years.

Then, in December 1995, she joined Citizens Bank as a public relations manager – a junior position. “I was green,” O'Donnell recalled in her 40 Under Forty application, “but very willing to learn, take direction and absorb what I'd been told would be ‘the Barbara Cottam experience.’”

Cottam, then director of public affairs and now corporate communications manager for Citizens Financial Group, “took me under her wing, showed patience with me and is partially responsible for the success I've achieved,” O'Donnell said.

“She taught me to think strategically, consider other points of view, be thoughtful in my decision-making, be fair, and most importantly, to laugh. Barbara has inspired me to dream bigger than I thought possible for

myself.”

Since joining Citizens, O'Donnell has not only risen to vice president and director of public affairs for the bank's Rhode Island division, she has also made an impact in the community by creating and supporting programs such as Champions in Action and Tools for Schools.

And, since 2002, she has been a board member at Children's Friend & Service, where she chairs the development committee and has been involved in the agency's annual walk-a-thon and annual corporate luncheon. She also was in the Class of 2004 at Leadership Rhode Island.

O'Donnell and her husband, Bill White, have two children, Charlie and Molly. ■

