

Founder of public relations firm sells business to gain family time

Jenny Ulum plans to return as an employee of the Ulum Group at the start of '09

BY **SHERRI BURI McDONALD**
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Leading a successful and growing public relations firm is a 24/7 proposition, and Jenny Ulum, founder of the Eugene-based Ulum Group, wants to reclaim some of that time for her family.

To that end, Ulum, 51, has sold her ownership in the firm that bears her name to its president, Pat Walsh, 47. Walsh now owns 56 percent of the company and Funk/Levis & Associates, a Eugene advertising firm, owns 44 percent, Walsh said.

Terms of the sale were not disclosed.

Ulum founded the business in 1995 with two employees, Walsh and

Jay Forsyth.

"She was the Ulum; (we) were the group," Walsh said.

Today the firm has 16 employees, annual revenues of \$1.7 million and offices in Eugene and Portland.

"I think good leaders recognize when it's time for new leadership," Ulum said.

"I'm proud of what we built in 12 years, and it's time for fresh blood to take us the next 12 years," she said. "Pat's really excited by the opportunity, and I'm excited to have him seize it."

Walsh said he isn't planning any immediate changes to the business, although a new name will be unveiled by the end of the year.

"We set the bar pretty high on what we hoped to provide clients in terms of service and creativity, and we're going to continue that," he said.

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During the past 12 years, Ulum and her associates have helped introduce newcomers such as Royal Caribbean's Springfield call center to this community and helped guide clients such as PeaceHealth through media mine fields at pivotal times in their growth.

At the start of the year, Ulum took a leave of absence from the Ulum Group and accepted a one-year stint as interim public affairs director at PeaceHealth. Brian Terrett, who had served in that position for the past seven years, resigned in January to work for a Northwest public relations firm.

Ulum had served as the hospital's public affairs director for eight years before launching the

Ulum Group.

"When Brian Terrett left, I was uniquely positioned to step in at a critical time," Ulum said.

Leading the hospital's public relations efforts this summer as it opens its \$552 million RiverBend hospital in Gateway will make for a "very intense year," Ulum said.

But, starting in '09, Ulum will recalibrate her work-life balance. She intends to return to the business she founded, but as an employee, instead of principal owner.

"I think that I'll continue to serve clients as I have in the past," she said. "I just won't have responsibility for the business side."

Ulum said she has given her all to build a successful

small business and, looking ahead, she saw two competing interests: the business and her family.

Ulum is married to Tim Gleason, dean of the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication, and they have a daughter, Margaret, who is 9 years old.

"As she enters the middle school years, I wanted to be positioned to be more present," Ulum said.

"I could see that my daughter was going to need more and more of my attention, and I could also see that was going to come at the expense of the business," she said.

Under the new arrangement, Ulum said she believes she can be a better contributor to the firm.

"I'll be staying within my capability," she said, adding that she wasn't able to lead the firm's growth in Portland and mentor the staff of 16, "the way I would want to."

Ulum said there were no other factors driving her decision.

"I thought it was really important to make the transition when everything is good — when I'm feeling good about the business and my family and about my daughter and about myself, and not wait until you think that you missed the opportunity to make that transition," she said.

As for her 30-year career in public relations, Ulum said: "It's been very interesting, very diverse, very satisfying — and it's not over."