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By Brad Spurrison

## **Memorable Moments in Chicagoland Innovation**

*About This Series:* The story of innovation in Chicago is best told through the experiences of accomplished local visionaries. All innovators are blessed with imagination, drive and at least a bit of serendipity. In this 10-part series, we will showcase how inspiration turns into execution and the creation of new systems. These stories are only the beginning.

### **Featured Innovator: Genevieve Thiers, CEO, Sittercity.com**



There is arguably nobody in the world that knows more about babysitting than Sittercity.com CEO Genevieve Thiers.

The oldest of seven children, Thiers worked her way through college sitting for more than 30 families. In 2001, after watching a pregnant mother struggle to lift her child and a bag of groceries up a flight of stairs, Thiers envisioned an international market around her institutional expertise. She founded Sittercity.com to provide families with a safe, reliable and affordable way to hire sitters.

Unable to raise startup financing – "it was the middle of the last recession and dot-com was a dirty word," she explains – Thiers took it upon herself to put Sittercity.com in motion. This included posting 20,000 fliers around her Boston College campus, earmarking her salary from IBM to pay the company bills and even "chasing moms down in supermarkets" whenever it was required.

By the time Thiers moved to Chicago to train as an Opera singer at Northwestern, her company had already grown out of its training wheels.

Today with more than one million online profiles, Sittercity.com is the undisputed leader in finding caregivers online. People now visit the site to find sitters for children, seniors, tutors, pets and homes. Last fall, the company raised \$7.5 million in venture capital financing. Sittercity.com is also regularly featured on The Today Show, Ellen and The View.

"It's important that everybody in the company now serve as visionaries for the same goal," Thiers said.