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By Brittney Wong

Entrepreneur talks on success without sacrifice

Genevieve Thiers, Music '04, brings a whole new meaning to the term multitasking.

The aria-singing CEO simultaneously runs two companies, performs in professional operas, acts as the child care expert on NBC's "The Today Show," and still managed to find the time to give advice to aspiring entrepreneurs on campus Monday night.

Thiers spoke to about 35 hopeful business-launchers at the Donald P. Jacobs Center after being invited by InNUvation, NU's entrepreneurship- and innovation-focused student group.

"You can become an entrepreneur in an instant," Thiers said.

For Thiers, that instant came while she was getting her undergraduate degree at Boston College.

She saw a pregnant woman struggling to walk up a hill outside her dorm room window, so she hurried outside to see if she could help. It turned out that the soon-to-be mother was putting up flyers to find a baby-sitter. Thiers sent the woman home and posted the flyers herself. It was then when she was hit with a "eureka moment," which birthed her first company, Sittercity.com.

Sittercity.com is an award-winning site that matches parents and pet owners with qualified sitters in their area. Prospective sitters post profiles that can include everything from contact information to videos to a background check. Parents in need of someone to care for their kids or pets can search for sitters based on several characteristics, such as non-smokers or Portuguese speakers.

This enterprise is not Thiers' first brush with child care. She has six siblings, so she grew up baby-sitting.

"My twin sister and I were pressed into slave labor very early," Thiers said. "You can't start a company unless you have intimate experience in the world that your company is in."

Within three weeks of starting the site, 600 sitters had created accounts. Soon, users started signing up from Boston to New York to Cleveland, and the company eventually went national.

"You would see it hit an area and it was like dropping water on a map," Thiers said.

Sittercity has grossed more than \$1 million, and is expected to pass the \$3 million mark within the year. It now boasts 150,000 sitters, a half-million parents and the title of one of the "50 Coolest Websites" of 2004, according to Time magazine.

Despite the success of Sittercity, Thiers said she still misses her first love: opera singing.

"While it was really starting to take off, I still didn't want to let go of music," Thiers said.

Thiers started trying out for parts, but said she soon found out that running a business and flying all over the country to audition was too much to handle. So instead of going to an opera company, she decided to create one herself.

Along with a few friends, Thiers founded OperaModa.com, a company that focuses on American operas and hiring young, emerging professionals who haven't had a major role. Thiers produced and starred in their first show while continuing to manage Sittercity.

Thiers' combination of skills appealed to students in the audience with similar passions.

"I'm interested in how she's balanced a career in the arts and in business because that reflects something I'm really interested in my own life, too," said Rachel Waxman, a Weinberg and Music freshman.

Kellogg student Kimberly Whinna said she enjoyed Thiers' message that one can create something from nothing.

"The most powerful thing that I got out of the talk was the fact that you can start a company, just bootstrap it," Whinna said. "You don't need the investors, you can start it on your own. It's going to be a lot of work, but you can run your company and you can keep your passions, too."