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By Michael Krauss

Motorola tech chief finds time for White House

White House visits are old hat for Sox and Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf. But they are a definite turn-on for Chicago's tech leaders. When asked about his recent visit, Reinsdorf looked weary. With six Bulls championships and a World Series trophy, he has a right to be low-key. We know Sox manager Ozzie Guillen's story: on vacation with presidential permission. Rest, Ozzie. We need a repeat.

Then there's Motorola Chief Technology Officer Padmasree Warrior, one of our town's top engineers, who hauled home gold from the White House last week. Warrior stopped by the White Hoarse to pick up the National Medal of Technology award on behalf of Motorola. Warrior was clearly jazzed. "It was awesome," says Warrior, fresh from the East Room ceremony and a meeting with President Bush. "I was very proud to be there."

The award honors the company's 75 years of innovation, and recognizes Motorola for creating the car radio, the walkie-talkie, the cell pone and other innovations.

On behalf of the engineers

Warrior didn't preen for the crowds as Olympic snowboarders Shaun White and Danny Kass did. She accepted the honor gracefully on behalf of Motorola's 24,000 engineers.

"It's a proud moment not just for the people who work at Motorola today, but for all who have contributed throughout Motorola's history," Warrior says.

A high tech Olympian, Warrior brought home the gold for Chicago. "Most of our innovation has come out of Chicago," says Warrior, who adds it's a victory for her company and our town.

Did Warrior give the president a RAZR, Motorola's sleek, hot-selling cell phone? She carries a limited edition gold colored RAZR that reportedly sells for \$2,000 on eBay.

"Nope," she says. "He gave me something." A well-deserved gold medal for technology progress. Let's hope there's a repeat.

Sittercity

Can an opera singer make it big in tech? In Chicago she can, and she can help you find a baby-sitter. Genevieve Thiers is the 27-year-old founder and CEO of Chicago-based Sittercity. She's also an operatic soprano.

As an undergraduate at Boston College, Thiers had a thriving baby-sitting practice. It was too good. There were more clients than she could serve. A natural born organizer, Thiers connected her overflow of customers with other college students.

Then she saw Match.com, the online dating service site, and realized the solution.

“We took the model of an online dating service and applied it to child care,” Thiers says. “We created Sittercity to address a desperate need by mothers in America.”

After launching in Boston in 2001, Thiers relocated to Chicago in 2002 to work on a master’s degree in opera at Northwestern. She still sings and acts, recently performing in “Little Women” at the Athenaeum, but this soprano is a committed entrepreneur.

“Nationwide we have over 20,000 parents and 150,000 sitters and nannies,” Thiers says. Prospective sitters sign up free. Parents pay \$39.99 for their first month and \$5 per month thereafter to access the site and prospective sitters.

Thiers attributes her love of sitting to being the eldest of seven children. Watching her sibs was second nature. She estimates she personally logged more than 2,500 sitting jobs over the years.

Don’t think for a minute opera singers have weak business skills. Quite the contrary, Thiers suggests: “Opera singers especially sopranos, have a reputation for being ditzy. That couldn’t be more wrong. The typical opera singer has to plot and scheme with the best of them. The fact that people underestimate us works to our advantage.”

Watch out, Monster.com. There could be a Chicago soprano in the wings.