

**Security Lumber**  
**Do it center**

*Shop where the PROS GO!*  
Looking for Home Improvement? Discover a Large Selection.

**Shop Online at Security Lumber!**

[Home](#) | [Subscribe to the newspaper!](#) | [Submit news tip](#) | [Submit announcement](#) | [Site map](#) | [Email this page](#) | [Contact](#) | [Webmail](#) | [Internet](#)



**Locals bow out of tournament play at  
Watseka Regional**

Daily-Journal.com

Find items you want in our Classifieds!

[Weather](#) [News](#) [Obits](#) [Sports](#) [Life](#) [Classifieds](#) [Jobs](#) [Vehicles](#) [Homes](#) [Sections](#) [Services](#) [Info](#)

Thursday, Oct. 26, 2006 48° & Light  
Rain

Search  Website  Google  Ads

Go! (a

Posted Online: 2006-05-15

## Virtual reality

[Comment on this story](#)

Limestone woman assists multiple  
bosses from her home

By Robyn Monaghan

rmonaghan@daily-journal.com  
815-937-1281



Photographer: Mike Voss  
5/10/06 The Daily Journal/Mike Voss virtual assistant Deanne Splear in her basement office.



Photographer:

Deanne Splear has a full-time job and answers to five bosses. But none of them will be looking over her shoulder today.

Like most working women, this Limestone mom fixes breakfast, gets her two preschoolers to the baby-sitter and sits down with a cup of joe at her desk to check her e-mail by 8:30 a.m.

Soaring gas prices haven't added a single cent to the cost of Splear's commute. When she heads off to the office, she just slips down the stairs to her basement cubicle.

Splear is one of a growing segment of the work force known as virtual assistants. The new and diverse job description sprouted onto the employment scene about seven years ago, according to the International Association of Virtual Office Assistants. Today about 1,500 people work at home doing tasks like data entry, medical transcription, accounting, graphic art design, programming, writing and marketing for companies around the world, the organizations estimates.



"My parents were both self-employed, so I was very aware of the benefits of working for yourself," said Splear, 29. "I knew I wanted to be my own boss."

It's a win-win situation for workers and bosses alike, professionals say. Companies that hire virtual assistants get workers without digging into profits for employment taxes, health benefits, or office equipment. The virtual assistants, who work on contract, get the freedom of setting their own schedules, the convenience of being able to do the laundry while merging a mail list and a whole world of employers to work for. But they are on their own when it comes to health insurance.

Splear's job as a human resource manager at Incobrasa, a soy bean processing plant in Gilman, dissolved in a downsizing last year. It was just the nudge she needed, she said, to explore her options. By building a business as a virtual assistant, she could capitalize on all her corporate skills without ever leaving the house. For a start-up cost of about \$5,000, she bought the computers, copiers and scanners she needed to hang out her virtual shingle, AdminiSource Now, on a Web site.

In just over a year, Splear has snagged five clients from California, England, Chicago, Pennsylvania and New York -- enough to keep her busy full-time. She earns from \$30 to \$70 per hour, depending on the task.

With a college degree in communications and public relations, Splear does jobs like designing company newsletters, maintaining data bases, doing Internet research, and writing follow-up letters to help her employers foster client relations. One day she might be digging up information on Victorian dolls for a client wishing to donate a doll to charity, balancing a credit card account for another, and arranging a flight itinerary for a third.

"It demands that you be able to switch gears quickly, to re-asses and re-focus on a minute's notice," Splear said.

#### Weak economy driving demand

Today's feeble economy is a driving factor in the popularity of computer-based co-workers. Companies that laid off employees to cut costs are now picking up virtual assistants to fill temporary workloads. The Virtual Assistant movement capitalizes on outsourcing and technology to overcome the increasing burdens of job insecurity, suburban overcrowding and family-hostile commutes, said Christine Durst, CEO of Staffcentrix, an ecommerce company that cultivates new virtual assistants.

"We're living in a knowledge economy now, where there's been a recent convergence that includes the acceptance of outsourcing as a time- and money-saving work method," Durst said.

Since 2000, the membership for the International Virtual Assistant's Association, a nonprofit association founded in 1999 to certify and promote the profession, has soared more than 600 percent, said Angela Allen, the organization's president. The exact number of working virtual assistants is difficult to discern, she said, because they work independently and not all of them are certified.

[Ads by Go](#)

[The New Times](#)

Stay Info  
Save 50'  
& Conve  
Delivery  
[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

[Illinois News](#)

Search Il  
News 17  
Find Any  
Event, A  
[www.News.com](http://www.News.com)

[Newspaper News](#)

Report e  
news me  
on conte  
economy  
& more.  
[www.PewT.com](http://www.PewT.com)

[Chicago News](#)

List of Ne  
in Chica  
info. Pho  
& more.  
[chicagolan.com](http://chicagolan.com)

Mark Penske, a managing member of the New-Jersey based United Atlantic financial services company, is one of Splear's five bosses. He's been working with virtual assistants for several years now. A big plus, Penske said, is doing business with another company owner who's looking out for her own bottom line.

"Some employees are out to get everything they can from the company without giving back 100 percent," he said.

"With a virtual assistant, they're wanting to do the best job they can to promote their own enterprise, to get it done and to get on to the next thing so they can start billing again," he said.

### Lonely life

A career through the computer can be kind of a lonely life, though. Water cooler chit-chats and power lunches are not on Splear's schedule. Once her two small children are at the sitter's and her husband Grant, a farmer, heads out to his fields, she might not see another real human all day long. On days the phone isn't ringing, she's completely on her own.

"It can be very isolating," she said.

Most virtual assistants are "people persons," Durst said. But they say they prefer to work alone -- finding that they're more productive without the interruptions associated with the traditional workplace to impede their progress.

That said -- "Care must be taken to make sure solitude doesn't feel like solitary," she said.

Virtual assistants can bridge the separation gap by bonding with other virtual workers through e-mail lists, message boards, instant message interfaces, and occasional phone calls.

To keep in touch with other professionals, Splear gets out to two or three social events for business people or workshops each month. She attends "Speed networking" dinners in Chicago, where business people change tables for every course of a meal to share a quick summary of their skills to potential clients.

### Comments

*These comments are the opinions of readers. They are not edited by The Daily Journal. Comments containing profanity will be deleted.*

*There are no comments on this article yet*

#### Post a comment

Your Name:   
(optional)

Your City/Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
(optional)

Comments:  
(No HTML)

\* 1000 character limit

Follow this discussion: If you'd like to be notified via email whenever additional comments are posted to this article, enter your email address below.  
(Optional)

Email address:

### Today's Most Read Stories

- [Cyber crimes task force arrests NIU professor for underage solicitation](#) (Page 1)
- [NIU professor arrested in Internet sex sting](#) ()
- [Metro Briefs](#) (Metro)
- [Metro Briefs](#) (Metro)
- [Metro Briefs](#) (Metro) >

### Additional Stories

- [Former head of I-PASS sues over suspension](#) (Illinois AP)
- [Bond hearing set for businessman accused in Polish murder](#) (Illinois AP)
- [Take home assignment: Trustees discuss revision of grading, homework policy](#) (Metro)
- [Story26](#) (Youth)
- [Connect with senior citizens this holiday season](#) (Metro)
- [Speakout 10/26/06](#) (Editorials)
- [Man linked to Miami terror plot pleads guilty in weapons case](#) (Illinois AP)
- ['Anthem' lyrics describe life on the farm](#) (Metro)
- [Brownspotlight26](#) (Youth)
- [Doctor found dead in downtown Chicago office](#) (Illinois AP) >

This web site and server is updated and maintained by The Daily Journal, Kankakee, IL 60901 - Copyright © 2006 The Daily Journal Publish Rights Reserved. Please review our [Acceptable Use](#) and [Privacy Policies](#).

[Subscribe to The Daily Journal](#)

E-mail contacts: [Webmaster](#) | [Editorial](#) | [Photos & Articles](#)



Visit other SNG news sites:

[QCOonline.com](#) • [MyWebTimes.com](#) • [HeraldArgus.com](#) • [Daily-Journal.com](#) • [Post-Bullet](#)  
© Copyright 2006 Small Newspaper Group