

Assistant carving out virtual career

Aide finds projects in other time zones to enhance future

By **ROB VARNON**
rvarnon@ctpost.com

BRIDGEPORT — A light glowing in another window in the city would most likely mean that someone's home relaxing after a day's work.

But in Vonetta Booker-Brown's apartment that glow probably means she is working for a client in Chicago, San Diego or some other part of the world.

Booker-Brown is making the promise of the Internet a reality as she works as a virtual assistant from her home after putting in a full day at another job. She calls her company RightHand Concepts.

Many people haven't heard of virtual assistants, according to Booker-Brown, but that may be changing.

"I think in the next five years it's going to blow up," she said. "It won't be, 'What's a virtual assistant?' It'll be, 'Who is your virtual assistant?'"

Booker-Brown offers clients word-processing, mailings, Internet research, desktop publishing, Web design, copywriting and many of the other services an administrative assistant would provide. She has a background in journalism and more than eight



Brian A. Pounds/Connecticut Post

On the job: Vonetta Booker-Brown of Bridgeport works on a client's Web site at her home-based business, RightHand Concepts.

years of experience as an administrative assistant. She also took classes on Web design and graphic arts.

All she needed to start her business was a good computer, phone lines and a few other pieces of office equipment, she said. All of her office equipment fits in one room of her apartment.

She said she is preparing to become a virtual assistant full time and has three solid clients.

Business trends over the last few years indicate her new career has plenty of growth opportunity, Booker-Brown claims.

She said because she is a contract employee who usually takes on specific jobs, companies do not have to worry about payroll taxes, health insurance or any of the other costs associated with a regular employee. She pays the taxes herself.

Demand for virtual assis-

tants was so great in the late 1990s that some of the first virtual assistants in the world formed the International Virtual Assistants Association, located in California, to support the growing industry. The IVAA provides certifications for its members and lists eight certified virtual assistants in Connecticut, who offer a variety of services.

► Please see **GROWING** on B2

Growing field: virtual assistants

Continued from B1

Booker-Brown said much of what she does is what a traditional administrative assistant does.

That's not to say virtual assistants will be replacing on-site administrative assistants, the entrepreneur added.

She said small businesses with office space and payroll issues may start out by employing a virtual assistant until things pick up. But even after clients hire on-site help, a company could still turn to off-site assistants for temporary work or special projects.

There might be some draw-

backs to being a contract worker, like finding insurance coverage, but Booker-Brown said she will be on her husband's policy.

Booker-Brown said she expects to make a comfortable living from her new career and there haven't been many problems getting started.

"The only thing you have to

get used to is the time differences," she said.

For more information on virtual assistants, visit www.ivaa.org.

Rob Varnon, who covers business, can be reached at 330-6216.