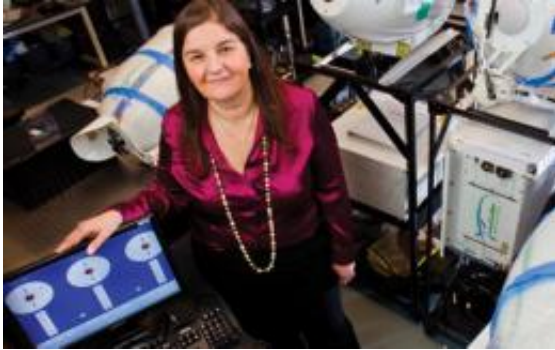


## Winds of fortune

May 2 2011, By Pamela J. Johnson

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Alisa Rogers (M.S., chemistry, '79) is co-founder of Optical Air Data Systems and Catch the Wind in Manassas, Va. Credit: Jeffrey MacMillan.

Alisa Rogers finished 10th grade and was already headed to Syracuse University. But before leaving her Baltimore high school, she met her future husband and business partner.

Philip Rogers was a brilliant young student who went on to graduate from Cornell University with degrees in engineering physics and aerospace engineering. They married and decided to attend graduate school on the West Coast, Alisa opting for USC Dornsife and Philip, Caltech.

In their 40 years together, they've produced three children, all Ph.D.'s in physics or aerospace engineering. They've also produced two multi-million dollar companies: their privately-owned Optical Air Data Systems, LLC, and its spin-off, Catch the Wind, now a public company.

“My husband’s strengths are my weaknesses and my strengths are his weaknesses,” Alisa said at their Manassas, Va., headquarters, where signs with messages such as “The best way to predict your future is to create it,” were displayed. “He’s the inventor and I have the skill set to help him with the implementation.”

Optical Air has become a world leader in the high power fiber optic laser business. They grew their company as a defense contractor, developing a laser wind sensor that allows helicopters to land safely in brownouts and whiteouts caused by dust, particularly important in Afghanistan and Iraq deserts. Today, the sensor is installed in their Vietnam-era helicopter they use for testing. The underlying technology is licensed to Rockwell Collins.

In 2008, they started Catch the Wind, which licenses the wind sensing technology from Optical Air for applications not used by Rockwell Collins. It also applies their wind sensing technology to wind turbines.

“The increased efficiency derived from our laser wind sensor is unmatched in the industry,” Alisa said, giving a tour of their lab and hanger.

The BMW Oracle Racing team that won the 2010 America’s Cup used their recently developed, miniaturized handheld laser wind sensor. In football, the product can measure the speed and direction of wind during field goals. The unit can be used for airport wind measurement and as equipment for first responders in disasters. Everything they sell, they invent.

Interesting path for Alisa, who earned her master’s in chemistry but decided she didn’t want to be a chemist. Her master’s, however, got her a job at Lockheed Martin as a materials and processing engineer responsible for Lockheed’s L1011 fuselage’s adhesive bonding. Philip

became director of special projects at Lockheed Skunk Works.

After having three children, the couple wanted to spend as much time as possible raising them. They returned to the East Coast and started a fiber optic laser business at home. Thirty-two years after graduate school, here they are.

“It’s not enough to be creative,” Alisa said. “You have to have a business sense to make the creativity a reality.”

Provided by USC College

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