



Gladiators

Meet the Olivia Popes of Columbus. BY EMILY THOMPSON

Though ABC's "Scandal" is about as dramatized as they come, the premise of the prime-time show, now in its fourth season, is based on reality. Inspired by Judy Smith of Smith & Co., a DC crisis management firm, the show follows Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington) and her firm, Olivia Pope & Associates, as they usher high-profile clients through crises like public scandals in which a politician's reputation is at stake.

"In the last 15 years or so, crisis communications has become its own profession," says Mark Weaver of Communications Counsel. "Before that, you would go to a public relations firm or go to an advertising agency and hope they had experience with crises." Though their work doesn't have the same Hollywood spin as Olivia Pope's, Columbus has its share of PR professionals who specialize in crisis communications.

Mark Weaver

A few years ago, the city of Steubenville, Ohio, hired Communications Counsel when news broke that one of their high school students had been sexually assaulted by



two football players. "The city manager knew that the reputation of Steubenville was at risk," says Weaver, who was the deputy attorney general of Ohio before founding his firm. "Most people around the country had never heard of Steubenville, Ohio, and the first time they were hearing about it was this very negative story." Weaver created steubenvillefacts.org (which is no longer active) to try to set the record straight about the city and the incident. A media law and litigation lawyer, Weaver and his firm do PR, advertising and crisis communications for 12 to 20 clients, including two members of Congress. Says Weaver, "We help people at the intersection of law, government and media." communicationscounsel.com

Hinda Mitchell

Hinda Mitchell has 20 years of PR experience, dealing with crises including work injuries and the 2010 Iowa egg recall. She founded Inspire PR Group last July; about 20 percent of the firm's work falls in the crisis management category, she says. Work with corporate companies, especially in the food and health care industries, as well as nonprofits, takes Mitchell and her team around the country, and sometimes around the world. "It has been my experience that very few crises happen between 9 and 5, Monday through Friday," says Mitchell, whose daughter is a "Scan-



dal" fan and likens Olivia's "fixer" mentality to her mom. "There are so many moving parts at the time of a crisis, there's no one superhuman who can do it all. We all need our own gladiators." inspireprgroup.com

Bill Patterson

An industry veteran, Bill Patterson started his career in broadcasting and in 1998 founded Reputation Management Associates. Patterson hosted media relations workshops and worked with hundreds of clients, he says, including E. Gordon Gee, former Gov. Bob Taft, banks and hospitals, counseling them on effectively communicating to the public and press. "In my career, I've dealt with every crisis you can dream of, from chemical leaks to people who told lies," he says. "One day, I got a call in the afternoon that a crane had cut a woman in half. I said, 'You want me to handle it, then do what I tell you.'" Patterson wrote a statement for the company whose equipment was involved and advised the company's president to lower their American flag to half-staff and send someone to stay with the family of the woman. "Sometimes you can recommend just the tiniest thing to have a big impact," he says. Though now retired, Patterson still occasionally advises Anthony Huey, who's now president of Reputation Management Associates. media-relations.com

