



## ANNETTE TADDEO

THERE'S IRONY BEHIND THIS COMMUNICATOR'S IMMIGRANT SUCCESS STORY

BY HOLLY OCASIO RIZZO

**I**rony paints Annette Taddeo's success. A challenging immigrant experience, language difficulties, and a storm that tore her from a teaching job all conspired to make her one of South Florida's leading businesswomen—and a promoter of cultural understanding.

In 1995, Taddeo founded LanguageSpeak Inc., a Miami-based company offering language translation, instruction, interpretation and cultural training in more than 40 languages. Today, clients include Office Depot, Eastman Kodak and American Express.



Taddeo, 37, was born to a retired U.S. Air Force pilot from New Jersey who settled in Colombia to open a helicopter school and flight service that shuttled the nation's presidents. There he married her mother, a local homemaker.

At 17, with political turmoil putting their lives in danger, Taddeo's parents sent her to live in Huntsville, Alabama, with friends of her father. But in the United States she encountered a big barrier to her dream of going to college: "I knew very little English."

She scored too low on the ACT to get in—"about the score you get for writing down your name," she says—because she didn't understand the language on the test.

The experience gave her a passionate cause, however. "We need to have a way to test those students who are not there yet with their English. Look at me today. If it weren't for the fact that my parents had the money to send me to non-credit classes, I wouldn't have gone to college."

Taddeo eventually graduated from the University of North Alabama and landed a job teaching Spanish at the school. Then Hurricane Andrew devastated South Florida, destroying her parents' waterfront home. Taddeo drove a motorhome to them. She parked the motorhome on their property, hooked up a generator, and the three of them lived in it for six months while the house was rebuilt. It was in Miami that she found a big market for teaching and translating for large companies—the beginning of LanguageSpeak.

"At some time in the future, I'd like to run for public office," says Taddeo, who is active in the local business community; lobbies U.S. legislators about ways to help kids with poor English-language skills; and contributes to organizations such as Operation Smile, which sponsors cleft-palate surgeries in poor areas of the world. "I would love to do it, because it would be the ultimate service I could give." H

# HISPANIC MAGAZINE

*Latina of Excellence*

Award Winner  
2004