

# Angela J. Ford

Angela Ford is the Executive Director of The Obsidian Collection Archives, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and amplifying the Black narrative. In this role, she also serves as Publisher of *Obsidian Magazine* and Producer of the *Obsidian Stories* podcast. With 35 years of entrepreneurial experience, Angela is a licensed real estate broker, author, and community philanthropist. A nationally recognized speaker and storyteller, she is passionate about ensuring the authenticity and accuracy of the Black narrative in history and media. Through archival photographs and powerful imagery, she brings Black history to life, using visuals to connect past and present while ensuring these stories remain accessible for future generations—including her own.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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Photo Credit: Ernest Collins

Angela Ford was born in June 1964 on the **South Side of Chicago**, the eldest of two sisters, to parents who both served as educators in the Chicago Public Schools system. She grew up in a vibrant community of Black homeowners, tradespeople, professionals, and entrepreneurs. Demonstrating an **entrepreneurial spirit** early on, Angela saved earnings from babysitting and tutoring to make her first significant purchase—a \$99 hanging wicker chair at just 14. Her son, now owns the chair as a family heirloom.

During high school, she worked at **McDonald's**, where her strong math skills earned her a promotion to an administrative role, balancing the day's registers. One of the highlights of her youth was being presented as a **Links Debutante**, a milestone that marked her transition to college life at Illinois State University. There, she earned a Bachelor of Science in Management and pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Angela's only professional "job" was at **U.S. Equities**, a midsize Real Estate Firm in Chicago, IL (now acquired by CBRE). From 1996 to 2003, she managed over 110 Chicago Public Schools during her tenure. After experiencing the challenges of finding quality housing as a single mother, she leveraged her real estate license to establish TAG [The Angela Group] Properties, Inc., a property management firm dedicated to serving Chicago's communities.

After a pivotal conversation with her **son, Steven**, Angela founded The Obsidian Collection Archives, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving and amplifying the authentic Black narrative for generations to come.

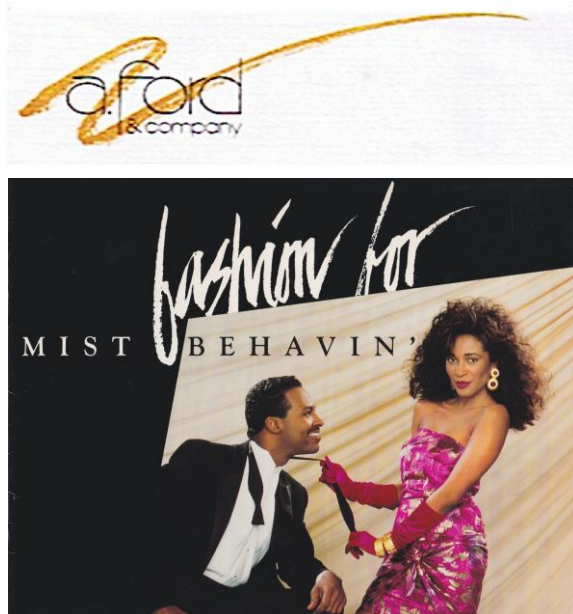
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## MILESTONES

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1986	B. S. of Organizational <b>Management from Illinois State University</b>
1986	Founded <b>A. Ford &amp; Company</b> , fashion, set design & production company
1992	Fashion Column " <b>IN STYLE</b> " in seven Black Legacy Newspapers
2001	Founded <b>TAG Properties, Inc.</b> a Real Estate Property Management firm
2005	<b>Taking the Leap of Faith</b> article in ESSENCE Magazine
2007	<b>Making a Little Company Look Big</b> Article in NY Times
2014	Founded <b>TAG Foundation</b> a community oriented nonprofit firm
2014	Created first of two <b>One-Day 500 Bicycle Giveaways</b> in Chicago, IL
2015	Authored book <b>Making a Micro Business</b>
2017	Founded <b>The Obsidian Collection Archives</b> , a nonprofit for Black Stories
2020	<b>Reclaiming the Black Narrative</b> , Talk at Google
2022	Named one of <b>Forbes 50 Women Over 50</b> for Vision
2023	<b>The Power of Positive Images</b> , TEDx Wrigleyville Talk
2024	Launched of <b>The Obsidian Magazine</b>





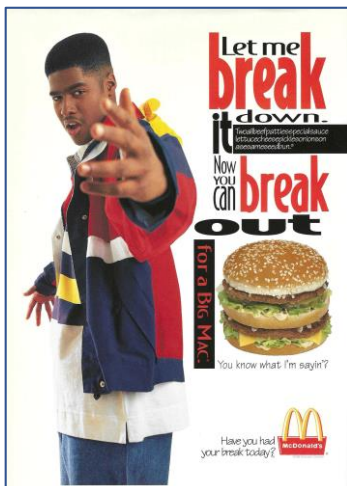
After graduating from college, Angela Ford launched her first business, **A. Ford & Company**, which thrived for a decade. Specializing in wardrobe, choreography, and fashion show production, the company served prestigious clients such as **Coca-Cola, Levi's, McDonald's, Sears, and Kellogg's**. Angela also collaborated with notable celebrities, including Spike Lee, Patti LaBelle, and George Benson. One of her most significant projects was partnering with Burrell Public Relations to create and execute a seven-year fashion show tour, ***Fashion For Mist Behavin'***, which traveled across America's Bible Belt.

During this **multi-state tour**, Angela and her team operated on a rigorous schedule, with just four days in each city to audition local talent, fit models, rehearse, and produce high-energy fashion shows for audiences ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 attendees. The experience instilled in her the mantra that **"the show must go on,"** teaching her how to adapt and deliver under pressure—all while still in her twenties.

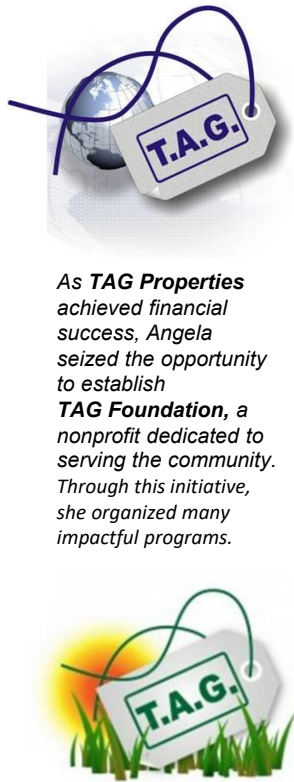
Beyond fashion shows, Angela expanded her creative reach by writing a fashion column called **"IN STYLE"** that appeared in several **Black legacy newspapers** nationwide, with its longest run in the **St. Louis American**. She also directed wardrobe and set design for commercials, music videos, films, and print ads, assembling teams, clothing, and props to meet her clients' creative visions.

Angela's work extended to creating print advertisements **featured in magazines** and newspapers nationwide. Her styling expertise also reached television, where she frequently styled commercials for the few Black TV shows of that era, ensuring cultural representation in mainstream media. These projects showcased her versatility and cemented her role as a creative force in both print and broadcast advertising.

These experiences solidified Angela's belief that there are no binary answers in creative industries—success is driven by understanding and delivering on a client's unique vision. Her ability to **consistently meet and exceed expectations** earned her repeat business and a respected reputation in the field.







**Angela Ford, 40**  
President and CEO of T.A.G. Properties in Chicago

**Property-Management Mogul**

Angela Ford likes to be in charge. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in organizational management from Illinois State University in 1986, she started a wardrobe-styling business. But self-employment was brief or fizzle, says the divorced mother of one. In need of a steady paycheck, in 1995 Ford took a job as an administrative assistant with U.S. Equities Realty, a major property-management firm in Chicago, earning about \$31,000 a year.

In winter 1998, a landlord who, according to Ford, was negligent neglected Ford's entrepreneurial fire. Ford and her two neighbors, also single mothers, had to huddle around a space heater for several nights after the furnace in their three-story, three-unit building went out. "Though he always collected the rent, the landlord cried broke," Ford says. "I thought, Why do we trust each other like this? I told God that if given the opportunity, I would treat my people better. I turned my property-management business in that apartment."

**SOLUTION-ORIENTED:** In 1999, using \$3,000 of her savings, Ford incorporated her business as T.A.G. LLC, which stands for The Angela Group. She began her business by managing tenant properties owned by her aunt and her grandmother, and later those owned by friends who sought her advice. In June 2003 she took out a mortgage and used \$5,000 of her savings to purchase a two-story, two-unit building in foreclosure that was selling for \$145,000. She thought buying properties would give her the means to eventually quit her job. Then she got promoted at work to facilities adviser in charge of 28 Chicago public schools. "I was intimated by that paycheck," Ford says. Still, the steady income of property losses in the Black community troubled her. She also began noticing that her White colleagues were learning up to her property in Black neighborhoods. "They were creating crazy wealth," Ford says. "I said, 'We've got to get a piece of this.'"

**"Ford began her business by managing properties owned by family members, and later those owned by friends who sought her advice."**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**  
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T. Shawn Taylor is lead reporter and feature columnist for the Chicago Tribune's Women News section.

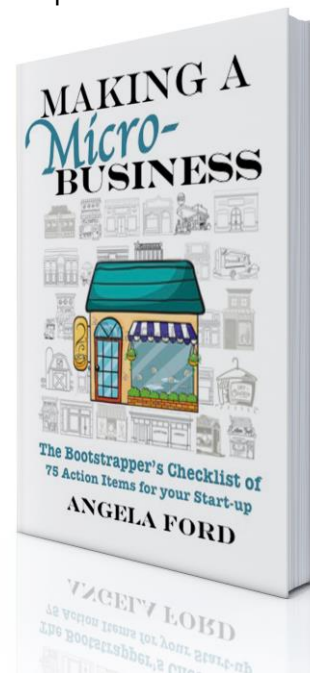
After facing the challenges of securing quality housing as a single mother, Angela Ford leveraged her real estate license to establish **TAG [The Angela Group] Properties, Inc.**, a property management firm dedicated to serving Chicago's communities with dignity and respect. Her personal experiences fueled her mission to create a company that prioritized tenant advocacy, sustainable property management, and community-focused solutions.

Over a decade of entrepreneurship, Angela balanced growing her business with personal milestones—marriage, motherhood, and eventually, divorce. At its peak, before the 2008 U.S. real estate collapse, TAG Properties managed over 2,000 units across the Chicagoland area. Her commitment to empowering her community earned her national recognition, including features in **Essence Magazine** and **The New York Times**. She distinguished TAG Properties by integrating eco-friendly management practices, earning a LEED-AP accreditation from the U.S. Green Building Council and securing major contracts with the **Chicago Housing Authority** and **Cook County Health & Hospital Systems**.

The financial success of TAG Properties allowed Angela to give back in meaningful ways. She founded **TAG Foundation, a nonprofit** dedicated to uplifting Chicago's communities and ensuring local children could experience the same joys she had growing up. One of the foundation's most impactful initiatives was the **One-Day 500 Bicycle Giveaway**, held twice to benefit children on the South and West Sides of Chicago.

Angela's passion for entrepreneurship extended beyond her own journey—she actively encouraged others to pursue their business ambitions. To support aspiring entrepreneurs, she authored **Making A Microbusiness**, a guide designed to help individuals launch and sustain small enterprises.

To promote **Making A Microbusiness**, Angela traveled across the country, speaking to aspiring entrepreneurs about the fundamentals of starting and sustaining a business. The book continues to sell today, serving as a valuable resource for those looking to turn their ideas into successful ventures.



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ONE DOLLAR

### Making a Little Company Look Big

Customers Never Need to Know the Size of a Start-Up

By ANNE FIELD

Small may be beautiful, but looking tiny is another matter. That is what Angela Ford thought six years ago, when she started TAG Worldwide, her Chicago-based real estate and property management firm.

At the time, Ms. Ford was working on the staff of a property-management company, and the last thing she wanted her customers to think was that she was operating the business during her lunch hour.

In an effort to create the impression that the company was bigger, she recruited for an answering service that used live operators. Customers would call Ms. Ford's home phone number and immediately be forwarded to the service. "The operator would say, 'Let me see if I can find a car,' and say my cell," Ms. Ford recalled. "If I could take the call, I would."

For Angela, a former in-house manager at the Chicago Entrepreneurial Management Program, at the University of Pennsylvania, such "pretense in the marketplace is a significant factor in success."

These days, it may be easier than ever to pull off this trick, thanks to technological advances. Companies can produce their own polished marketing materials, use foraging services to make the numbers seem large and more firmly established than they are, and more firmly established than they are. Of course, no matter how adept, their slight-of-hand will not work unless they are delivering the goods.

The most common way to tie the customer's gaze is probably to design a sophisticated Web site, with all the bells and whistles of a bigger company's offering.

Ms. Ford, a partner with the firm, has experienced with Web sites. She has a partner with the firm, from Dicks & Nattam, divides his work into areas of expertise and often hires separate local business corporations for handling each one, with a separate Web site. He has small-business consulting, along with trademark and insurance law, and three or four more areas in the pipeline. And he does the same thing for clients. He has set up as many as 18 companies and Web sites for some clients.

"We include their strategy and spin them off into multiple Web sites," he said. "We find people can help but be improved."

To build a successful company, entrepreneurs need to play a variety of roles — visionary, sales representative and morale booster, to name a few. But in some cases, especially in the early years, they may need to play another, less obvious one: the chameleon.

At first, they worked with local and local office and their current partners. Then they began adding clients who decided they wanted a way to be successful that did not require an extension of their doctor's office. They entered the Web-based local private health exchange, or PHE, system, now 30 across the country, from Nevada to New Jersey. They used the Web and program their phones to be connected to the PHE system, which automatically routes patient calls to their number. Two to three hours are usually on call at any one time.

Of course, low-tech approaches also work. Ms. Ford, for example, gets careful attention to visual presentation. Whenever members of her maintenance crew appear at a property, they drive a truck with her company logo, and they also wear a light blue uniform featuring the logo. "Clients don't want to deal with something that appears to be a makeshift operation," she said. "They don't want to see someone who looks like they're barely able to get it together."

Mr. Ford's even arranged for a certain telephone number, making sure to get a nice low ending in a double zero, with a fast number ending in seven. "The implication is, 'We have eight other lines,' she said.

Then there's Evan Carmichael in Vermont, who runs a Web site, [www.carmichael.com](http://www.carmichael.com), providing advice to small-business owners. From time to time after starting his firm, Carmichael found himself facing a pressing opportunity. A local selection contest doing a story on chief executives of state agencies wanted to interview him for the segment, at his office. At that point, however, the firm consisted of Mr. Carmichael and one employee, operating out of a spare bed shared with another company.

Mr. Carmichael acted quickly. He called five friends, asking if they would like to be on TV. All they had to do was wear a suit and spend time at his office, looking like busy employees not sitting in the background, which he was overheard. Mr. Carmichael also asked the office mates if they would check out and let him use the entire space, and they agreed. He didn't even have to worry about the sign on the door, since there was only a small number.

After the segment aired, Carmichael's friends appeared to be working in the background, and the segment was broadcast, with its five co-stars.

Mr. Carmichael said, "I'd do it again."

Not everyone believes that size is necessarily a hindrance. In small businesses, however, James Williams, who runs a radio show and Web site called the Small Business Advocate, thinks it is not only desirable to be hidden, but can even be a plus. He makes no attempt to hide the fact that his firm has just four employees.

"Big companies think it's an advantage to deal with a smaller business," he said. "It means that you're more visible and recognized than a bigger guy."

When Angela Ford started her real estate management company, she was its only employee. A low-budget answering service helped it look bigger, and now it has grown to fit the image she sought to establish.

Using the trappings of a larger business can help a tiny one grow.

Her philanthropic efforts were recognized by **The Chicago Community Trust**, which named her a **Community Philanthropist**, featuring her among 100 changemakers in celebration of its centennial anniversary.





While working to preserve *The Chicago Defender* archives as a labor of love for her city, Angela Ford often shared stories about Black Chicago with her son. A pivotal conversation with him revealed the stark lack of representation of Black Chicago's rich history online. His experiences teaching abroad in China, South Korea, and Thailand further highlighted global inaccuracies in the Black narrative. Determined to correct this, Angela founded *The Obsidian Collection Archives*, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving and amplifying authentic global Black stories for future generations.

Angela formally established *The Obsidian Collection Archives* with legal counsel and has since mastered the art of grant writing, raising \$1.6 million to date from philanthropic foundations. Her commitment to building a world-class tech platform for Black history has led to **securing eight trademarks**, developing **two web platforms**, and acquiring a robust digital asset management system designed to house millions of Black images from around the world.

Beyond archival work, Angela launched *Obsidian Magazine*, a digital and print publication that tells compelling Black stories, and produces the *Obsidian Stories* podcast, which preserves firsthand accounts from living legends. Demonstrating her commitment to amplifying Black narratives, she hosted the Chicago premiere of *King of Kings: Chasing Edward Jones*, a documentary about the legendary numbers' runner, ensuring its NAACP Image Award nomination and eligibility for Oscar consideration.

Angela's influence extends beyond *The Obsidian Collection*. A celebrated public speaker, she has delivered a **TEDx Talk** with over 42,000 views, given a featured **Talk at Google**, and continues to travel the country sharing historic lessons on the Black narrative. Her impact has earned her a place in the inaugural class of **Forbes 50 Women Over 50** in their Vision Cohort.

Through partnerships with **Google Arts & Culture** and **Newspapers.com**, an organization that has digitized over 2.1 million pages of vintage Black newspapers, making invaluable historical records accessible worldwide. Looking ahead, she has already expanded *The Obsidian Collection* to London, established a presence in Kenya, and is forging partnerships with AI firms to push the boundaries of digital preservation. In an exciting new development, she has acquired a 135-year-old mansion, named *Obsidian House*, to serve as *The Obsidian Collection Archives*' flagship location. Focused, committed, and ambitious—Angela Ford is ensuring that Black history is preserved, celebrated, and shared like never before.





