



NAWBO Announces Top 10 Michigan Business Women of the Year

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Troy, MI – The National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) Greater Detroit Chapter honored the Top 10 Michigan women business owners and women in leadership roles for their contributions that are making a difference in the business arena, their communities and support in uplifting Michigan’s economy on March 17, 2011. The 17th Annual **NAWBO Top 10 Michigan Business Women Awards** luncheon took place at The San Marino Club, in Troy. A Business-to-Business Exhibit Showcase kicked off the event and the luncheon and awards program followed immediately.

The Top 10 Michigan Business Women of the Year and the runners-up are:

Breakthrough Award -- honors a woman business owner who has overcome obstacles or removed obstructions for other women in the workplace.

- Sheila Jensen, Visotek, Inc. (Winner)
- Crystal Williams, Crystal Vision Communications, LLC (Runner-up)

Diversity Champion Award – recognizes a woman, organization or business that has promoted and facilitated diversity

- Rolanda Heard, Chrysler Group, LLC (Winner)
- Linda Ware, General Motors Supplier Diversity (Runner-up)

Giving Spirit Award – celebrates a commitment to bettering the community through volunteerism and/or philanthropy

- Molly MacDonald, The Pink Fund (Winner)
- Jeanette Abraham, JMA Logistics, LLC (Runner-up)

Global Business Award – recognizes doing business across borders

- Rona Lum, Law Offices of Rona M. Lum, P.C. (Winner)
- Felicia Chang, Global Wave Today (Runner-up)

Pinnacle Award – honors a woman who has owned one or more businesses for 25 years or more



NAWBO 2011 Top 10 Michigan Business Women Award Winners, back row from left: Jennifer Willemsen, Curl Up & Dye Detroit; Molly MacDonald, The Pink Fund; Lori Ann Blaker, TTI; Kathleen Boyle, CEED; Rolanda Heard, Chrysler Supplier Diversity; Theresa Thompson, president, NAWBO/EXCEL. Seated from left: Sheila Jensen, Visotek Inc.; Pamela Rodgers, Rodgers Chevrolet; Vickie Lewis, president, NAWBO Greater Detroit; Tammi Hart, State of Michigan; Rona Lum, The Law Offices of Rona Lum, PC; The Rush Group representative. Rogers Foster Photography

- Andra Rush, Rush Trucking (Winner)
- Michelle Cortright, Harbor House Publishing (Runner-up)

Rainmaker Award – recognizes significant financial growth

- Lori Blaker, TTi Global (Winner)
- Jami Moore, JEM Tech Group (Runner-up)

Red-Tape Buster Award – recognizes government representatives that have consistently demonstrated commitment to helping women business owners

- Tammi Hart, State of Michigan (Winner)
- Frances Savickis, Social Security Administration (Runner-up)

Up and Coming Award – honors and emerging and promising woman business owners who has owned her business for five years or less

- Jennifer Willemsen, Curl Up & Dye (Winner)
- Cheryl Chorazewitz, Bottle Docker, LLC (Runner-up)

Warrior Award – commends a woman business owner who has persevered through business loss and currently owns a successful business

- Pam Rodgers, owner, Rodgers Chevrolet (Winner)
- Michelle Richards, Center for Empowerment and Economic Development (CEED) (Runner-up)

Words of Wisdom Award – applauds a woman who has been instrumental in educating and mentoring women toward achieving their careers or dreams of business ownership

- Kathi Boyle, Center for Empowerment and Economic Development (CEED) (Winner)
- Prudence Cole, Being@work, Inc. (Runner-up)

Special recognition was given to Theresa “Tee” Thompson of Tea Time Events who received **Greater Good Award** for her drive, energy and commitment as president of the NAWBO EXCEL/GirlBiz program. The program helps to teach underprivileged high school girls throughout Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties how to become women business owners, be creative, increase awareness and tap into their inner power and interface with successful women entrepreneurs and women business leaders.

The NAWBO Greater Detroit Chapter was the first women’s organization in the Detroit area to recognize women business owners and leaders for their contributions in the business community. The award finalists are selected based on several criteria, including: size and growth of their companies, challenges they have overcome, community service and public advocacy in support of business.

NAWBO Greater Detroit Chapter Corporate Partners include: Comerica Bank, Ford Motor Co., General Motors Corp. and Sam’s Club. Visit www.nawbogdc.org for more information.

Winners and Runner-up Bios

Up and Coming Award

- Jennifer Willemsen, Curl Up & Dye Detroit, Inc. (Winner)

Who would ever have thought that a Roller Derby Girl would one day grow up to be a driving force in the revitalization of Detroit's Midtown Region and the Cass Corridor? But that's precisely what Jen Willemsen did in 2008, when she opened the retro-themed hair salon, Curl Up & Dye Detroit, that earned her notice by none other than the New York Times, in an article titled "Detroit Entrepreneurs Opt to Look Up."

"We're dedicated to educating our clients," Jennifer states. "Curl Up & Dye is the only salon in the state of Michigan that uses all organic products, free of sulfates and other fillers that can destroy your hair." Forever seeking higher standards in her industry, Jennifer also started her own organic hair and skin care product line called the Cass Corridor Brand.

"Being a woman business owner, specifically a hair salon, can be difficult, especially in a male-dominated city like Detroit. But I've found that with consistent and proof-positive results and sincere, thoughtful business practices, you can garner respect from anyone."

- Cheryl Chorazewitz, Bottle Docker LLC (Runner-up)

Every athlete – whether professional or armchair – knows the importance of an ample supply of water, but until Cheryl Chorazewitz came along, most had to depend on others to keep it available while they participated in their sport. Her Bottle Docker product allows you to hang your water bottle on your pants or biking shorts – even a bikini bottom – for "hands-free" transport.

Chorazewitz spent the better part of 20 years reporting directly to the CFOs of companies, but never gave serious consideration to owning her own business until the Bottle Docker opportunity arose in January 2009. The design patent, trademark registration, and WBE Certification came in 2010.

"My previous positions gave me direct exposure to business ownership," she says. "But for me to step out and do it for myself, I had to be passionate about the product. I've gained the equivalent of a Master's Degree in business over the last two years, and am motivated to try new things for the rest of my business life."

Breakthrough Award

- Sheila Jensen, Visotek Inc. (Winner)

Sheila Jensen co-founded Visotek in 2001, with the intent of commercializing the advanced laser technology and systems developed by a nonprofit research and development center. With no background in laser manufacturing, Jensen built the business organically, showing modest growth with no debt financing. In 2007, Visotek had 23 employees, two product lines, moved into a 10,000 square foot manufacturing facility, and hired a CEO.

Six months later, the economy took a drastic downturn, the CEO had put no emphasis on sales, and a failed licensing agreement wiped out two years worth of work and significant investment. Jensen returned to the CEO chair, bought out her partner, downsized the engineering staff, and refocused the company's direction.

Visotek earned WBE Certification in 2010. After 9 years in the male-dominated world of laser technology, it took a return to self-reliance and trust in her own instincts and abilities for Jensen to break through. Visotek is positioned to triple its revenue in 2011.

- Crystal Williams, Crystal Vision Communications, LLC (Runner-up)

Throughout her 30 years in the corporate arena, Crystal Williams dreamed of owning her own business. She

finally had the chance when she was faced with early retirement choices from General Motors Corp, where she had worked as the manager of Diversity Communications.

In the two years since she founded the public relations and event planning company, Crystal Vision Communications, Williams has provided services to organizations such as the Academy of the Sacred Heart, the Oakland County Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Division, CEED, Pontiac Meals on Wheels, and the 15th Annual Urban Wheel Awards at the North American International Auto Show.

“I am proud and thankful to be a business owner in Michigan during challenging economic times, and hope that my business can be an example to women of all ages,” she says. “If you have a great idea connected to your passion and develop a plan and are persistent, opportunities come.”

Words of Wisdom Award

- Kathleen Boyle, Center for Empowerment & Economic Development (Winner)

When Peter Pan creator J.M. Barrie said, “It is not real work unless you would rather be doing something else,” he was clearly referring to people like Kathi Boyle, CEED’s Women’s Business Center Program Manager. Kathi knew she had found her passion in 2002, when she published her first book and began teaching business development and business financial literacy.

As Program Manager of the Women’s Business Center at CEED, Boyle oversees education and training of women and minorities in small business development and expansion. She came to CEED having owned and operated businesses in manufacturing, marketing, real estate, finance, and even a martial arts school.

“Women of my generation were not raised to appreciate their talents or even to acknowledge that they had them,” Boyle states. “To help change that perception with my generation and to see self-confidence in the newer generations is a wonderful reward for teaching.”

- Prudence Cole, Being@Work, Inc. (Runner-up)

Whether she’s coaching C-Suite executives in leadership behaviors or mentoring small business owners, Prudence Cole believes we all have an obligation to give back. “I’m just one example of the talent that generated much success in the 80s and 90s, and now needs to support those following up,” she says. “We can’t afford to leave all this talent just sitting on the bench.”

Founder and Owner of Being@Work, an executive coaching and consulting business, Prudence is co-author of “Finding Power, Passion and Joy Being at Work.” Nominated as one of Crain’s 2010 Women to Watch, Cole was formerly an executive with EDS, leading large operations and directing leadership development worldwide.

“My words of wisdom come from experience,” she says. “And an every-expanding knowledge of business and job search, and a personal commitment to discover the most effective way to spur an individual on to greater success. I feel that my influence as an executive coach has a ripple effect on the organizations my clients lead.”

Red-Tape Buster Award

- Tammi Hart, State of Michigan (Winner)

When Tammi Hart stepped up as the supplier diversity coordinator for the State of Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget over four years ago, she never imagined how many amazing women

business owners she would meet along the way.

Hart travels across the state, helping Michigan-based companies understand how to do business with the state of Michigan. The department believes in openness and transparency and encourages all vendors—especially women business owners—to participate in the state’s bidding process. In her tenure, she has met with more than 100 women business owners, and mentored women and minority business owners through their first contract with the state of Michigan.

In 2005, Hart was the first recipient of a diversity award from the Women’s Business Enterprise Council–Great Lakes. “Most important of all,” she affirms, “I believe in being a catalyst of positive change, and continue promoting, driving, and fostering diversity within the Department of Technology, Management & Budget’s Procurement and Real Estate Services Administration.”

- Frances Heimes-Savickis, Social Security Administration (runner-up)

In her role as the public affairs specialist for the Social Security Administration, Fran Savickis responds to the concerns individuals have about retirement, survivor, disability, Medicare and Supplemental Security Income benefits.

Savickis started with Social Security in 1973 as a claims representative. Six years later, she became a field representative. She has served as a public affairs specialist for Social Security in Southeast Michigan since November 2004. “I help individuals navigate our governmental system of benefits and services for their best interest,” she says.

In her 37-year-career with Social Security, Savickis has earned the Deputy Commissioner’s Citation, the Chicago Regional Communicators Award, and the Distinguished Federal Service Diversity Award. She serves as the lead liaison with an outreach program assisting the homeless in filing for benefits in Southeast Michigan.

Giving Spirit Award

- Molly MacDonald, The Pink Fund (winner)

Women make up 48 percent of our national workforce, and a large percentage of them, whether entrepreneurs or not, are the main breadwinners in their families. When a breast cancer diagnosis detours their career, the financial fallout can feel as life threatening as the disease.

Molly MacDonald learned that first-hand when, as a working mother of five, she was diagnosed in the midst of a career transition in 2005. “I knew this early stage disease would not take my life,” she states, “But it did take my livelihood for six months, during which I underwent two surgeries, six weeks of daily radiation, and fed my children through a food bank.”

Her experience led her to found The Pink Fund, a nonprofit organization that makes short-term bill payments on behalf of breast cancer patients whose stream of income has been interrupted by their diagnosis. In 2009, The Pink Fund provided payments covering housing, transportation, insurance, heat, and lights for more than 25 breast cancer patients in Michigan. MacDonald hopes to expand the Fund nationally within a few years.

- Jeanette Abraham, JMA Logistics, LLC (runner-up)

Growing up in Detroit and attending Detroit Public Schools, Jeanette Abraham says it was the specific mentoring of her passionate teachers that catapulted her into believing in herself. Jeanette founded JMA Logistics after 32 years with General Motors. At first, she wasn’t certain she could lead, coach, manage and

inspire others—particularly in a traditionally male-dominated environment. “I was quick, however, to discover the confidence and spirit needed to handle this great opportunity,” she says.

Abraham is a frequent speaker at selected schools, stressing to students the importance of being their best in every endeavor. She shares her personal achievements, and works hard to instill in the students a belief in their own greatness.

“I love to get in the heads of young women who are interested in entrepreneurship,” Abraham says. “I love challenging them with my experiences and sharing the tools required to make a go of someday running their own business.”

Diversity Champion

- Rolanda Heard, Supplier Diversity, Chrysler Group LLC (winner)

Managing Diversity Supplier Development for an international company emerging from bankruptcy reorganization sounds like a role that would make even the strongest quiver, especially when the 10-person Diversity department was downsized to just two people. But it hasn’t shaken Rolanda Heard at all. She was determined to stay, and see the Chrysler Diversity Department rise from the ashes, stronger and more committed than ever to helping women remain a part of the supplier base.

She insisted Chrysler go forward in celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Matchmaker Event and maintain a presence in the Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council, even though it was a tedious automotive industry year. “I remain insistent that Chrysler strengthen its commitment to minority and woman-owned businesses,” Heard states, “and encourage woman-owned companies to become WBE certified.”

Heard manages more than 682 suppliers, and has been a consistent and strong supporter of woman-owned businesses in the United States and Canada.

- Linda Ware, Supplier Diversity, General Motors Corp. (runner-up)

In 1968, General Motors established the automotive industry’s first formal supplier diversity program. Since that time, GM has spent more than \$70 billion with diverse suppliers. During the post-bankruptcy era in 2009, when the program was in need of a major “refresh,” Linda Ware was appointed as Supplier Diversity Manager, overseeing GM’s relationships with more than 400 suppliers. Under her direction, the department exceeded their 2010 Tier 1 Diversity Spend, implemented electronic tracking systems for Tier 1 diversity spending, hosted several diversity-related events, and initiated training sessions on the GM Global Sourcing Process.

As an advocate for women entrepreneurs, Ware provides mentoring and coaching, acts as a sounding board, identifies potential opportunities, and ensures that women are included in diverse supplier activities.

“Throughout my 31 years at General Motors, I have promoted diversity in the workplace, and mentored diverse suppliers,” Ware states. “I will continue to develop a diverse supply base that will work with GM to design, build, and sell the world’s best vehicles.”

Rainmaker Award

- Lori Ann Blaker, TTi (winner)

Describing her 30 years as a women business owner in automotive staffing and training as “challenging, enlightening, daunting, disheartening, and certainly never boring,” Lori Blaker has personally overseen the

establishment of Technical Training Inc.'s offices in China, Japan, Thailand, India, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, the UK, and The United Arab Emirates. In several of these countries, TTi has also established charitable programs to assist the local residents.

From the beginning, she was the lone female attending meetings and conferences. "I didn't want to be ridiculed or dismissed by the men, which was a normal occurrence," she says, "So I made sure that I always knew what I was doing." With hard work, honesty, integrity, and delivering on promises, she earned the respect of the men in the industry.

TTi has posted a 25 percent year-over-year growth average over the past five years, with a 32 percent year-over-year growth in 2010 – true "Rainmaking" figures for any company any year, much less during the most challenging time in history for the domestic automotive industry.

- Jami Moore, JEM Tech Group (runner-up)

When Jami Moore left a corporate position to buy out her father's business in 2000, she had no idea how to run a business. But, she told herself: "work hard, never give up, and you will succeed." Ten years later, she is quick to say she has no regrets, and is happy with her personal and professional accomplishments.

In 1999, JEM was under \$2 million in annual sales. Despite the economy in the last two years, the company still reached \$5 million, and now enjoys a strong pipeline leading them to their goal of \$10 million in annual sales in the next 3-5 years.

Moore credits her success to having passion for her work, following her dreams, never giving up, treating others as she wants to be treated, staying balanced, never taking advantage of her client relationships, and surrounding herself with a strong support system.

"I do a lot of networking," Moore says, "and tell other women business owners that if they want to succeed, they have to love what they do."

Warrior Award

- Pamela Rodgers, Rodgers Chevrolet (winner)

Pamela Rodgers' path seemed set. A rising star in the financial department of Ford Motor Co., she made an unusual and gutsy move – one that turned her into a leader in the industry.

She saw Ford's dealer training program as an excellent investment and business opportunity, but was refused entry in the program based on lack of retail experience. "So, I quit my job and started selling cars," she says.

She was told that women were fragile and could not handle the competitive nature of the business. "There were so many naysayers, even family members and friends. This became my inspiration – I was determined to become a dealer," she says.

She opened her first dealership in 1993 and has been going strong ever since. Rodgers claims that the rejection from the dealership program, the death of her business partner, and the misconceptions of being a black woman in the industry, created the groundwork for her success. Today, Rodgers Chevrolet in Woodhaven regularly appears on Black Enterprise Magazine's Top 100 list.

- Michelle Richards, CEED (runner-up)

Twenty-five years ago, when Michelle Richards met with potential funders and government officials about

women's economic development, they assumed she was addressing child care and catering.

Today, because of the efforts of the Center for Empowerment & Economic Development (CEED) team, one in 11 women are entrepreneurs, and CEED is able to assist more than 6,000 women business owners in Michigan each year. CEED has been a part of the movement to change the face of the American economy, and Michelle Richards has been the driving force behind it.

Richards believes that social change is most quickly accomplished through economic change. She was part of the group that helped to form the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), which provides the leading third-party certification of women business enterprises in the United States. There are now almost 11,000 certified women business enterprises.

Richards has invested in staff education, and through her leadership, CEED has produced a procurement manual with step-by-step information on government contracting.

Global Business Award

- Rona Lum, The Law Offices of Rona M. Lum, PC (winner)

As a champion of immigration issues for companies hiring foreign nations, Rona Lum routinely works with businesses and individuals around the globe. She has been a guest speaker at international immigration law conferences in Santiago, Chile, Salzburg, Austria, and Johannesburg, South Africa. Her clients are located across the U.S., and in Canada, Mexico, India, China, Japan, the Philippines, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Australia, The United Kingdom, Italy, France, Germany, Russia, Romania, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Ghana, and South Africa.

"We are constantly working with the embassies, labor departments, and other agencies of foreign governments to successfully assist our clients in obtaining the necessary work authorization for their international workforce," Lum states. Her job is made all the more complex by the continual changes in processes and procedures put in place by U.S. Immigration agencies.

Since 2004, The Law Offices of Rona M. Lum have assisted client companies in transferring more than 1,500 members of their international workforce to various countries throughout the globe, resulting in their corporations securing contracts and realizing millions of dollars in revenues.

- Felicia Chang, Global Wave Today (runner-up)

Years ago, Felicia Chang was an urban planner in China's initial wave of city development. She founded the first revenue-generating company in an academic environment in China, led several projects, and won the Beijing City Mayor's Award. Since coming to the U.S., she has worked with global teams and advised executives across multiple regions, and spent many years with General Motors in areas such as strategic planning, marketing, engineering, design, and operations.

Today, as Founder and a Partner in Global Wave Today, Chang assists small and medium-sized U.S. enterprises assess opportunities for expansion in China. Her Chinese background, U.S. Education, and 10-plus years of global business experience equip Chang with a unique perspective on international market opportunities and business models.

"Becoming a successful business woman is an obtainable goal for many women business owners," Chang says. "It is rewarding and challenging at the same time," adding that a strong commitment and a desire for success is required, especially for an entrepreneur.

Pinnacle Award

- Andra Rush, The Rush Group (winner)

Andra Rush, a descendant of the Mohawk Tribe from the Six-Nation Reservation, Bay of Quinte Tribe near Branford, Ontario in Canada, is the founder, president and chief operating officer of The Rush Group – a Minority Business Enterprise – that includes Rush Trucking Corp. and Dakkota Integrated Systems,= LLC. The Rush Group is one of the largest Native American owned businesses in the United States.

Early in her career, she worked evenings and weekends as a nurse while pursuing a master's degree in business. As part of the program she accepted a summer internship at an air freight company. With mentoring from the owner, Rush became interested in the trucking industry. Convinced of its growth potential, she founded Rush Trucking in 1984.

What started as a three-truck company funded with her credit cards and a loan from her parents has grown to more than 1,500 tractors, 3,000 trailers, 100 straight trucks and 45 flatbeds with 620 employees.

- Michelle Cortright, Harbor House Publishers (runner-up)

Michelle Cortright was the first woman field technician for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the first woman member of the Alpha-Zeta agricultural fraternity at Michigan State University, and the first female recipient of the “Man of the Year” award by the bi-national Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Maritime Forum. They changed it to “Person of the Year” the next year.

Always opening doors for women in business, Cortright expanded Harbor House Publishers beyond its founding niche of Great Lakes maritime commercial transportation into a turnkey publisher. She's also committed herself to community, serving as the Evangeline Township Clerk, and a Township Trustee for more than a decade. She is the current chair of the Boyne City Main Street Downtown Development Corp.

“Along the way in life, you don't know where you will end up. You don't know that every step you take will lead you to where you are today,” she says. “Isn't it amazing how this comes to pass? As I look back on my career to date, I see how every day was in preparation for this day.”

Greater Good Award

A special award recognizing a woman or man whose activities and actions have had a lasting impact on the quality of life and business in Detroit, Southeast Michigan and the state of Michigan.

Theresa Thompson is president of the NAWBO EXCEL/Girl Biz program and the president of Tea Time Events, a full-service event planning, production and management company that focuses on bringing the client's vision to fulfillment with accuracy, flair, and excellence. As the head of Tea Time Events, Theresa has tackled productions big and small, from philanthropic golf outings, corporate shows and product launches, to private events and themed tea parties. She is known in the industry and throughout the community for her high-energy style, gregarious nature, commitment to her work, customer service, stylish and “green friendly” events.

A Detroit native, Theresa boasts an extensive project management and legal background, including work for Kmart, General Motors Corp. and Ford Motor Co. Her management, logistical, diagramming and legal skills, coupled with an eye for detail and quality, makes for a master event planner. She also excels at setting up event advertising packages and attracting sponsors. As an expert networker and alliance builder, Theresa is involved in multiple organizations including the Central Macomb Optimist Club, National Association of Women Business Owners, the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Macomb County Chamber of

Commerce, the American Bridal Association, the National Association of Catering Executives, and the International Special Events Society.