

THE TRADITION PRESENTS INSPIRING PEOPLE

SUZAN DEISON

Founder / CEO

Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce



Suzan Deison has always believed that empowering women empowers our communities—and the world beyond. And yet, when she considered the future of her six granddaughters fourteen years ago, she was disappointed with the lack of visibility of the role models for women and girls existing at the time.

"I wanted my granddaughters and other young women to have the opportunities that men had available to them in business," said Suzan. That—along with her strong belief in what a Chamber of Commerce can do for a business and a community—was the motivation for her to establish the Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce (GHWCC).

Who first inspired her? "My Dad encouraged me with unconditional love. That made me resilient. If someone said 'No,' then I would circle back to them later!" It was her Mother, however, who paved her professional path. "She had a dress shop when I was in high school, and I helped her go to market to buy and had my first experience in selling. She was the one who showed me how to have a strong work ethic."

Suzan uses this work ethic today to benefit others. When asked "What makes a successful Chamber?" she is quick to respond. "Relationship-building is the single most important factor in empowering women. I kept my former relationships," said Suzan, a native Houstonian who had been president of the Greenspoint Chamber and the Galleria Chamber prior to founding GHWCC. The relationships she developed in those earlier positions included executives from many Fortune 500 companies, as well as small business owners. "They believe in me and trusted my commitment to others," she said.

Those relationships bore fruit as she developed the GHWCC into the multi-faceted non-profit it is today. "At our Chamber, we provide opportunities for women to succeed in business, including building valuable business relationships, providing them with B2B opportunities, developing leadership skills, opening doors for career advancement, and providing the tools and resources to serve on corporate boards," said Suzan of just some of the offerings of the GHWCC.

The Women on Board Institute is a year-long program with no more than 20 in a class. "As you look at boards now, they are male-dominated," she said. "When we have more women leading on boards, then women will have the opportunity to recommend other women."

She says the Chamber also provides women-led start-ups the tools and resources needed to be successful, including developing a business plan, marketing, branding, developing business relationships and leading a team. "This is so that everything is in place when they apply for a loan," she said.

Or—when they are appealing to investors. One of the most exciting things is the partnership of the GHWCC with the Houston Chapter of Golden Seeds Angel Fund. "The second Tuesday of the month, we host Office Hours, where Golden Seeds investors are able to hear and advise founders of women-led scalable businesses," said Suzan. They are also providing opportunities for Houston founders to have access to Golden Seeds investors across the nation.

Other GHWCC programs include the education committee, benefitting female high school and college students; government affairs; the international committee; the Women's Health Network of the Texas Medical Center; and the Thought Leaders Institute. Also, the Chamber recently is proud to host the GHWCC SBA Women's Business Center.

Today, Suzan is still excited following a two-day conference that the GHWCC produced. Nationally recognized speakers were there to encourage and empower women. "The feed-back was inspiring, not only from our guests, but also from the speakers," said Suzan. "I still have to pinch myself when I look at the lives we are changing with our programs like the conference, and at the local, national and international support we continue to receive."

"When I look back at the GHWCC over the last 14 years, I am inspired by the lives we have changed and influenced, from our board members to the newest member who joined after the Conference," said Suzan. For example, one board member attributes her current job to a relationship she made through the Chamber. A member shared that she found the confidence and resources to start her own accounting firm, and another found access to capital through their LAUNCH program. Another received a large real estate listing from her visibility leading an event, and another received a promotion because of the brand value she was giving to her company from volunteering with the GHWCC.

The Chamber even helps at-risk, third-grade girls in a program called STEAM Town USA. (STEAM references science, engineering, arts, and math.) "Perhaps the greatest inspiration I have experienced," says Suzan, "is to see the young third-grade girls in our STEAM Town USA blossom with confidence after graduating from this program."

The GHWCC is truly changing the trajectory for women in the greater Houston area. "I believe we all have a path in life. I was in the right place at the right time to found the GHWCC and feel that it is truly my calling." We are thankful for that timing, because Suzan Deison is one powerful role-model today for any woman—or young girl.

Linda Faulkner Johnston—Tradition Senior Living

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