

CLEVER VISIONS, 10 SAVVY WOMEN



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By Ann M. Gynn

Forward-thinking entrepreneurs thrive on challenges. The 2007 Top 10 Women Business Owners of Northeast Ohio presented by NAWBO and KeyBank have built their success by not only focusing on the future, but by constructing a plan, building a framework and altering (or expanding) it to get them there. They are not alone. In Ohio, women light up the business world—owning more than 269,000 privately held businesses. Combined, they generate more than \$35 billion in sales and employ more than 234,000 people, according to the 2006 report from the Center for Women's Business Research. With those numbers, Ohio ranks sixth in the

country for most privately held, majority women-owned businesses.

The 2007 winners were selected by a panel of three independent judges who are stars in Northeast Ohio as well: Rebecca Braun, chief operating officer of JumpStart Inc., Mark Hauserman, director, John Carroll's Entrepreneurs Association, and Sonya M. Wagasky, business development specialist, U.S. Small Business Administration, Cleveland District Office. On April 17, the winners will gather to celebrate their past and future success at the annual Top 10 awards dinner at the Marriott Downtown at Key Center.

NAWBO Cleveland's inaugural Tower Award recognizes Goodman

Cleveland's National Association of Women Business Owners will honor Gail Goodman, CEO of Constant Contact with its first-ever Tower Award at the April 17 awards dinner.



Goodman took on the leadership role in 1999 at Constant Contact, which provides e-mail marketing service for small businesses, associations and nonprofits. The Massachusetts-based company succeeds by building lasting relationships with its more than 100,000 customers with professional service.

Goodman earned her bachelor of arts from The University of Pennsylvania and an MBA from Dartmouth. She is a trustee of the Massachusetts Software Council.

In addition to receiving the first Tower Award, Goodman plans to share her insights on success with the dinner guests.

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Rachel Downey Studio Graphique Cleveland



Creating a niche and turning down business has proven the right course for Studio Graphique and Rachel Downey. Begun as a freelance graphic design studio 10 years ago, the firm, like many start-ups, was willing to take almost any work that came its way. Three years ago, though, Downey boldly chose to focus on a unique market and became the first Northeast Ohio firm to specialize in environmental graphic design (EGD).

Turn into Steelyards Commons, walk through Heinen's Fine Food stores, stop by Lake Erie College or Shaker Square to see Studio Graphique's work—they use graphic design to communicate brand identity, wayfinding and signage.

What gets you out of the bed in the morning?

Usually my son's demands for juice.

What kept you going during difficult times?

The strength of my family keeps me going all the time. Knowing that they are always behind me to support me if I stumble (or crash) and provide unconditional love and faith in me allows me to take risks and grow.

What has been your best idea?

As someone who makes a living coming up with ideas, my best one is always the next one.

When you were in the second grade what did you want to be?

Years after I finished my visual communication degree at Kent, my mom found a paper I wrote in fourth grade titled "When I Grow Up I Want to be a Graphic Artist." I have no recollection of that wish or that paper, but it must have somehow set the course.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Having started my business when I was 25, my early years were internal battles of my youth and inexperience.

Where do you come up with your best ideas?

At home, sitting in my living room with a view, drinking a beer with my husband and listening to music. The relaxing of the mind brings great things to the surface.

What was the best advice you ever received?

"Get over it." Whenever I question my own abilities or confidence, this is a great one to apply.

How often do you take vacation?

I think vacation is critical to rejuvenate the brain and soul. We take two week-long trips a year plus several long weekends.

What is your motto?

I have a mantra word—balance. I constantly strive to find the balance between work and play; doing what I know well and learning something new; being creative and being sensible; seeking new adventures and finding time to be quiet.

What would make Northeast Ohio a better place for business?

Northeast Ohio is a terrific place for business—the problem is it seems to be a secret!

Christine Gregory Educational Management Services Inc. Parma



Owning one business was not enough for Christine Gregory. After founding Educational Management Services in 1985, she continued channeling her entrepreneurial spirit. In 1995, when her largest client, ETI Technical College,

was searching for a new owner, she partnered with another client to buy the school. Around the same time, they established Ohpaky Inc. as a real estate arm.

The eventual sale of ETI prompted the purchase of Euclid Beauty College, which has almost quintupled its student population as well. Today, Gregory continues to operate the beauty college, real estate venture as well as her 20-year-old company, Educational Management Services. EMS has expanded its post-secondary education management services into curriculum and program development, state licensing and accrediting assistance.

What inspires you?

My greatest joy comes from helping others reach their fullest potential in their business, economic, professional, social or spiritual lives.

What kept you going during difficult times?

My faith. I am a firm believer that God directs our paths and that everything happens for a reason. Having a supportive husband like my Eddie is invaluable.

What has been your best idea?

Becoming an entrepreneur. Years ago, my marketing professor said that people generally work for a company for 30 years, climb the corporate ladder to about \$60,000 a year and retire with a gold watch. But, if you research the market, find the right product, you could make \$60,000 the first year! I believed him.

When you were in the second grade what did you want to be?

A school crossing guard.

If you had an hour to spend with anyone, who would it be and what would you topic would you discuss?

Jane Edna Hunter who in 1911 founded The Phillis Wheatley Association for young Negro women coming up from

the South who were denied access to the local YWCA. My topic would be how to convince Oprah to open a school in Cleveland for young girls.

What was the best advice you ever received?

From my dad who taught us to be fair and honest and to always do the right thing.

What do you do when you're not working?

Lots of church work. I voluntarily conduct college, financial aid workshops.

How often do you take vacation?

Annually, if clients, staff and students let me.

Do you have a motto? What is it?

Yes. Keep the faith!

Constance Hill-Johnson Visiting Angels Senior Homecare Cleveland



When her employer downsized in 2001, Constance Hill-

Johnson opted to fly solo. Faced with uncertainty in the country after having been on a plane Sept. 11, she yet remained optimistic about her new venture, Visiting Angels Senior Homecare.

Customer service tops the priority list for Visiting Angels, establishing industry benchmarks for the in-home care industry. Phones are answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week by Visiting Angels staff. The company emphasizes personal attention to its clients by visiting their homes at least twice before any agreements are made. Clients meet and approve recommended caregivers, and caregivers also are given the opportunity to meet prospective clients before service is initiated.

The results have been positive. Many staff members have remained with

Congratulations

from the Presidents of
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Candace M. Pollock ('81-'82) Hahn & Pollock, Atty.
Maria Heckaman ('84-'86) Maria Heckaman & Assoc. Inc.
Marguerite Harkness ('90-'92) Marguerite I. Harkness, CPA
Judi Firestone ('92-'94) CRSN, Inc.
Nina McCullough ('94-'95) Woodbine Studio, Inc.
Linda Johnson ('96-'97) L.M. Johnson & Associates, CPAs
Jane Baracska ('97-'98) Kona-Kini Productions
Sharon Toerek ('98-'99) Licata & Toerek, LPA
Leslie Resley ('00-'01) Cleveland Printing & Offset Company
Kathryn Tatman ('01-'02) The D'Amore Tatman Group, LLC
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We'd like to recognize **Stella Moga, president and CEO of Le Chaperon Rouge**. Making a difference in the business world isn't easy. Now, we're glad to salute a very special person who has. Congratulations to Stella for being honored as one of the Top 10 Women Business Owners of Northeast Ohio by the National Association of Women Business Owners—Cleveland. Stella's vision, hard work and success have inspired us. And apparently, we're not alone. From all of us at Huntington, kudos to you, Stella. Partnering with energetic, innovative business owners like you is something we always believe in.

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Visiting Angels for more than three years, which Hill-Johnson says is paramount to the clients.

What kept you going during difficult times?

The belief that I was providing a needed service that would benefit not just the senior desiring to stay home, but as importantly the family members who are the caregivers.

What one thing would you do differently?

I would have hired office support staff sooner. It's hard to know when to pull the trigger on hiring staff.

When you were in the second grade what did you want to be?

Doctor.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Learning to delegate appropriately as the business grows. Having managed it all, every detail from the beginning, it is really sometimes a challenge to allow others to handle some aspects of the business.

What was the best advice you ever received?

One of my staff repeatedly reminds me that I can't be everything to everybody. It's a challenge to keep telling myself that when so many times I want to be able to address every need a family member may have regarding his or her loved one's homecare needs.

What do you do when you're not working?

Attend Cavs games, go to the movies, just relax.

What is your motto?

Always operate with integrity.

What was your turning point in becoming a business owner?

I was downsized by my former employer in 2001. I didn't work for one entire year, trying to determine if I should get another "job" or go into business for myself. Well, here I am now!

Katherine M. Mlakar
The Millcraft
Paper Company
Cleveland

Katherine (Kay) M. Mlakar grew up in the family business, The



Millcraft Paper Company. And as a third generation owner she continues Millcraft's tradition of more than 50 years—women running the business.

Mlakar's grandparents founded the business in 1920. When her grandfather died in 1956, her grandmother, Pauline Keil, became its sole owner. Twenty years later, her mother, Jane Keil McKinney, became the owner. In 1986, Mlakar and her sister, Linda McKinney Hart, took on ownership. Hart, who lived out of state, eventually sold her shares, leaving Mlakar as majority shareholder.

The \$200 million company today operates under an evolving business model with the thinking, as Mlakar says, "It gets tougher and tougher when you compete with the big guys."

What gets you out of bed?

My to-do list.

What kept you going during difficult times?

The support of my family and the hard work of those whom I work with.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Time management among business, family and social.

If you had an hour to spend with anyone, who would it be?

It would be with my grandfather and I would ask him to share with me all of his dreams and visions for Millcraft.

Where do you come up with your best ideas?

In my car when I am alone and not distracted.

What do you do when you are not working?

I enjoy my children and grandchildren and the outdoors.

How often do you take vacations?

As often as I can. It clears my head, slows me down and helps me see things in a better perspective.

What was your turning point in becoming a business owner?

Realizing how being a woman-owned business could be advantageous to our bottom line. After being woman owned for three generations we could finally and proudly promote it and celebrate it.

What would make Northeast Ohio a better place for business?

We need more businesses in Northeast Ohio. We need to increase our critical mass here. Millcraft supports a number of local organizations committed to growing or attracting business in our surrounding area.

Stella Moga
LeChaperon
Rouge Child Care
Centers & Private
Elementary
Amherst,
Avon, Hudson,
Independence, Rocky River,
Strongsville, Westlake



Stella Moga founded LeChaperon Rouge in 1982 and has developed, refined and grown it ever since. In the last three years, she entered new markets in Hudson, Independence, Avon and Amherst. At each site, she opened with a full complement of students and started a waiting list.

What kept you going during difficult times?

The adversity I experienced for years in communist Romania has made even the worst days here in my life and my business seem like a walk in the park.

What has been your best idea?

My best idea was choosing to purchase sites and build my own schools from the beginning rather than leasing space. The leverage provided by ownership allowed me to expand with no need for partners or investors who might compromise my dream.

If you had an hour to spend with anyone, who would it be?

I would like to spend some time with any of the major composers or Renaissance artists to thank them for their gifts to humanity. I would also enjoy the opportunity to sit with Karl Marx and describe the extraordinary volume of human suffering that was the direct result of his failed vision.

Where do you get your ideas?

My ideas come at anytime from anywhere.

What's the best advice you've received?

My parents told me to be honest and work hard and good things will come.

What do you do when you're not working?

I spend as much time as possible with

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my grandchildren, Isabella and Marcus. I also enjoy dancing, shopping for art or antiques, working out and vacationing.

What is your motto?

"If you put your heart in it, you can do anything."

What was your turning point in becoming a business owner?

This came as I was trying to purchase my first building. The banking community dismissed me as high risk. Having only \$5,000 in capital, I still managed to convince the owner to sell to me with a combination of relentless perseverance and the grace of God.

Vera Muzzillo

Proforma Cleveland

When Proforma was looking to thrive, founder and CEO Greg Muzzillo knew whom to call—his wife, Vera Muzzillo. She brought 10 years of commercial lending/credit and financial consulting experience and understood the importance of strategic planning. In 2001, Vera Muzzillo became co-CEO of the North American provider of graphic communications and business solutions.

A mother of 10, Muzzillo's business goal is straight-forward if not simple—to be the best in the industry on all levels. She is well on her way to reaching that goal. In 2006, Proforma ranked first in business services franchise by *Entrepreneur*.



What inspires you?

The dreams of our family, friends, franchise owners and vendors are what inspire me.

What gets you out of bed?

Knowing that I am making a difference in other people's lives.

What kept you going during difficult times?

Faith.

What has been your best idea?

My best idea was emphasizing quality over quantity. This idea has helped us build a stronger company.

What one thing would you do differently?

I would have owned my own business at a younger age.

When you were in the second grade what did you want to be?

A teacher.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Adapting to change.

If you had an hour to spend with anyone, who would it be?

The first female president—and I am hoping that will happen soon! I would discuss how a woman can achieve anything and how we can impart that into young women.

Where do you come up with your best ideas?

When my mind is clear, which is usually when I wake up in the morning.

What was the best advice you ever received?

If you think you can or you can't, you're right.

What do you do when you're not working?

Spend time with my kids.

How often do you take vacation?

Once a year.

What is your motto?

It's nice to be big, but it's more important to be the best.

Loretta Paganini

The Loretta Paganini School of Cooking Chesterland

Considering Cleveland an "incredible gastronomic center" and seeing countless numbers of culinary students leave the state for a professional education elsewhere, Loretta Paganini had her new quest—establishing a professional culinary institute in Northeast Ohio.

As the program grew, Paganini recognized she would need a new and larger facility to house the necessary professional equipment as well as the expanding student base. But the new space could not be just any space. She eyed the future, wanting to construct a complex with multiple kitchens, classrooms, a student restaurant, library and offices along with the potential to build dorms.



Struggles ensued—finding a location that met all her needs and a construction company willing to build it in less than a year. She persevered and eventually found 12.5 acres across the street from the school's original home in Chesterland.

In November 2005, the International Culinary Arts and Sciences Institute opened in its new 12,000-square-foot home.

What inspires you?

My mother (business owner).

What gets you out of bed?

My love for teaching.

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What kept you going during difficult times?

My vision, goals and dreams.

What has been your best idea?

To identify the need in Northeast Ohio for professional culinary education and build a professional school to keep students from leaving our state.

When you were in the second grade what did you want to be?

A teacher (I used to line up on chairs all my dolls and teach them).

What has been your biggest challenge?

Because of the type of business that I'm in—culinary education—people do not take me as a serious business owner, they keep telling me that I have a great hobby.

If you had an hour to spend with anyone, who would it be?

Julia Child, I would discuss with her how we can teach American children better eating habits and help the children obesity epidemic.

Where do you come up with your best ideas?

At night. I keep pen and paper by my night stand.

Mary Reed Peplowski

Madison Pet & Garden Inc. Madison

July 28, 2006, was a watershed moment in the five-year history of Madison Pet & Garden. The rain came and MPG, situated along a creek in Madison, found itself the victim of one of the worst floods ever in the region. The more than 20 tons of feed in its basement-level warehouse were ruined. Hundreds of horse-bedding bales sat destroyed in the nearby sales yard.

"In the morning light, we stood shocked and shattered," Mary Reed Peplowski says. "Where you start? Whom do you call? Who has a pump big enough to empty a basement? What do you do with 20 tons of ruined feed? Do you open for the day or close and clean up? How do we go on?"

Peplowski, and her husband, Michael, knew the answer to that last question—they would go on and do what they had to do. Madison's local feed store turned out stronger, smarter and better than it had been.

MPG sets itself apart from other retail feed stores. The Peplowskis created it as a destination store that "celebrates the lifestyles and passions of our customers." It also provides high quality pet foods, wild bird supplies and



seed, lawn and garden essentials, and horse and livestock feed and supplies.

What inspires you?

Learning from other business success stories.

What gets you out of the bed?

Horses that need to be fed and cared for before work.

What has been your best idea?

Focusing on quality products and customer service.

When you were in the second grade what did you want to be?

Cowgirl.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Finding the right skill mix in employees.

Where do you come up with your best ideas?

Driving, mowing the lawn, anything that keeps me in one place, but mentally free.

What do you do when you're not working?

We have show horses and their care and training occupy my free time.

What is your motto?

What is good and right will always float to the top.

Diana Richards
Vacuum Systems International Cleveland



Diana Richards conceived her business in a parking lot after meeting with a retail clothing store chain about its vacuum cleaner maintenance issues. She saw the need for a centralized management program for companies that owned large quantities of vacuum cleaners. Since opening the doors to Vacuum Systems International, Inc. on Jan. 12, 1995, with just a card table, chair and fax machine, VSI has remanufactured more than 250,000 vacuum cleaners saving 6 million pounds of waste from our nation's landfills. The Vacuum Helpline Program serves more than 60,000 international retail stores, hotels and cleaning contractors becoming North America's largest vacuum cleaner remanufacturing company. VSI manages all vacuum cleaner needs including new sales, parts, supplies and trouble shooting minor problems.

Richards is proud to say VSI was a "green conscious" company long before it became popular, recycling everything from the cardboard boxes, cords and copper. VSI's clients love

the fact they can advertise they are a making sound environmental decision by remanufacturing rather than replacing their commercial vacuum cleaners.

How often do you take vacation?

I'm gone from Ohio six to eight weeks a year ... most always in contact with my office.

What gets you out of the bed?

My dog Lily, between 5:30 and 6 a.m. Mornings are definitely the best time of day for me.

What one thing would you do differently?

Concentrate on the accounting position in the company. Today, we have a great system; but previous years it has been really rough and cost the company.

When you were in the second grade what did you want to be?

Heavier. My nickname was Zipper—if I turned sideways I would disappear.

What has been your biggest challenge?

The first year of startup. No money; trying to find good people, systems, vendors ... looking back it was the best of times and the worst of times.

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If you had an hour to spend with anyone, who would it be?
Wayne Dyer. Meditation has been such a major portion of my life and most of the inspiration has come from him.

Where do you come up with your best ideas?
Meditation and prayer ... very powerful combination.

What inspires you?
The success of others—especially women.

What's your motto?
"Walk by Faith, Not by Sight." It's a hymn.

Mary Swank
Simply Swank Hudson
Since 1991, Simply Swank Salon & Spa has been a success. It expanded from its original 550 square feet to 3,200 square feet seven years ago, saw its clientele grow from 3,000 to more than 10,000, and grew its staff from four to 24 employees. While a creative venture, Mary Swank says it was a focus on the business aspects that have helped make positive changes in the last few years.
Expanding its staff by 600 percent meant Simply Swank had to be more



formal in its operations—outlining expectations for staff, creating an employee handbook that spelled out systems and processes, and setting up tools to track and manage the overall business.

What inspires you?
I am inspired by people who provide exceptional customer service. In fact, I am mesmerized by service. I find myself constantly studying and evaluating service providers relating to any type of business from banks to restaurants and cleaners to coffee houses.


What gets you out of bed?
My daily workout.

What's the best advice you received?
My first landlord, Bill Stemple, owner of Printer's Devil in Hudson, once told me "You need to buy a building, be the landlord and have your business rent the space from you." I had never thought that far outside of the box before nor did I have a clear understanding of what would be involved. With the help of a good banker, accountant and lawyer, we made it happen. We purchased our building in 2000. After being declined by two financial institutions we finally found one that believed in our dream and helped us finance our project. We took a second mortgage and a home equity loan to get things off the ground.

Where do you come up with your best ideas?
Usually I come up with my best ideas when I am traveling. When I am at home I am always rushing around getting things accomplished.

What do you do when you're not working?
I actually have a hard time just sitting; being busy is what I enjoy most. When I'm home, you can always find me in the kitchen trying new recipes.

What was your turning point in becoming a business owner?
I was working as a hairdresser for a salon owner who had no business or management skills. But what they did have were people skills. And I thought to myself if they can do it so could I. ■



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Top 10 Women Business Owners of Northeast Ohio

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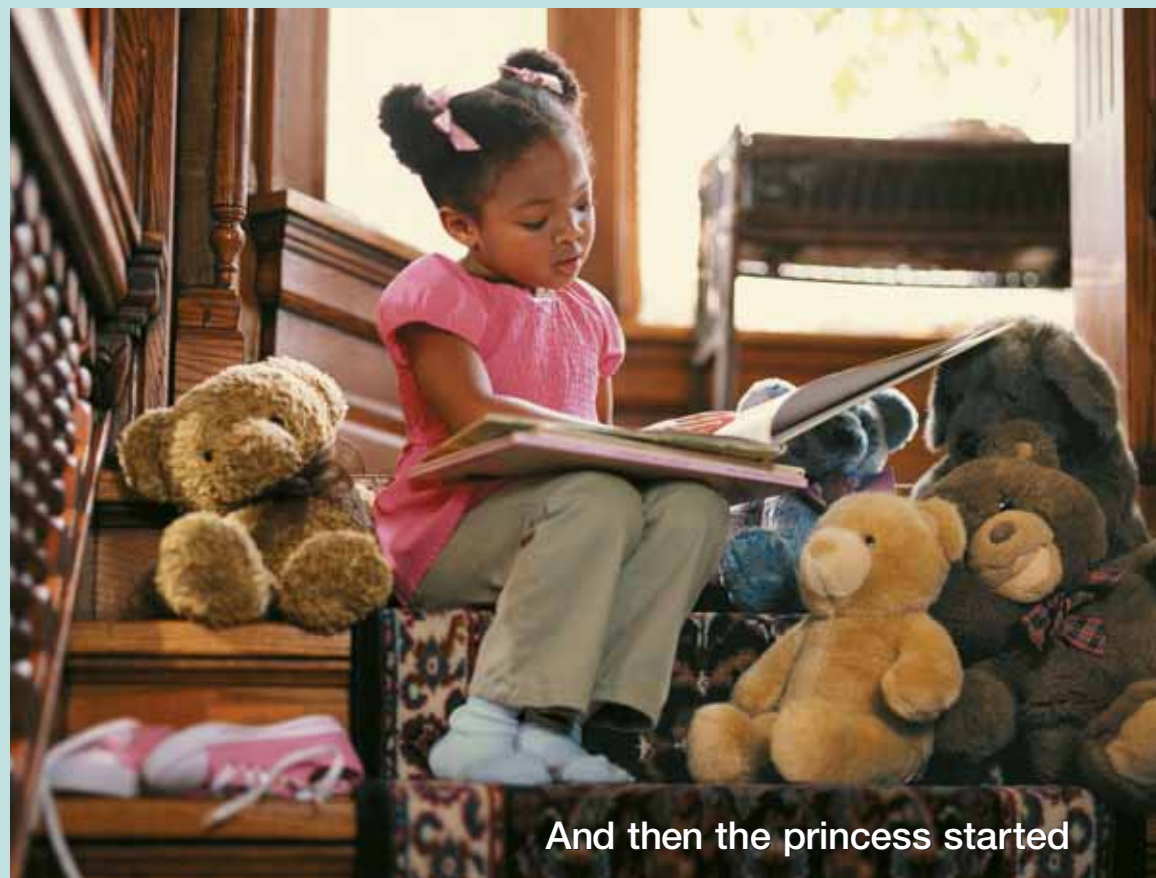
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