



Lacey Osborne

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By Lacey Osborne

We certainly have an impressive number of women business leaders in St. Tammany. At the risk of leaving someone out, I would like to name a few.

I will begin with Maura Donahue, partner and executive vice-president of DonahueFavret Contractors. In 2005, Maura was the first woman to serve as chairman of the board of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. When Katrina devastated our region, she was asked if she wanted to resign. Thank you, but no thank you. No way. Fast forward to 2019 when she was asked to serve a second time, and this time for 18 months, through November 2020. The year of the COVID-19 pandemic, another first, another disaster, and still the only woman to ever serve in that position. “Only the strongest steel goes through the hottest fire.” In good times and in bad, Maura has led with perseverance in her family business, her community, her state and her country. All communities, governments and organizations are grateful for all strong women leaders.

Of our five major St. Tammany hospitals, three of their CEOs are women. Of our seven member Northshore legislative delegation, we have three leading women.

At our Chamber’s annual business appreciation luncheon last month, 19 awards were presented. Nine of them were accepted by women business owners.

Many St. Tammany top producers in real estate and banking are women!

Our Chamber's board of directors currently has nine of 24 women serving. Impressive progress has taken place with women at the helm of our Chamber as well as other local nonprofits. On the recently announced Forty Under 40 top achievers list, 27 are women. Our Northshore Young Professionals group, now in its 11th year, has had six women serving as chairman.

It is incredibly important to the future of our parish, state and country for young professionals to prepare to step up to leadership roles in elected office and throughout the community. Being involved on any chamber committee provides opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. Ask any of the men or women who serve on any board or commission; I think they will concur.

We all make choices in life and there is a time in your life for everything. It is best to know what you want and be willing to work for it. Along the way there may be dark days, failures and disappointments, but there is also courage, patience, accomplishment, regaining of confidence, bravery, and always, kindness and encouragement toward others.

Even today, women are still sometimes challenged by the glass ceiling. But we have come a long way baby! In my own Chamber of Commerce profession, the number of women CEOs has increased. Twenty-five years ago, 70 percent of chambers were run by men and now that has flipped with 70 percent run by women.

Many accomplished women are also accomplished mothers and consider it our greatest calling. My college roommate and BFF is the mother of four and now happily the grandmother of 11. She and her husband



worked hard as their kids were growing up in Slidell, she as a banker and he as a corporate attorney, both commuting to the city daily. She is another hero of mine. I used to marvel at her energy and accomplishments, both as a human resource professional, a mother and wife. Her goal was to retire and enjoy her grandchildren—a worthy goal that she is living today.

Both my parents grew up in the Irish Channel. My father's father began a homebuilding business and my mother's parents, Edward and Josephine Kerrigan, ran a barroom and restaurant. Edward, Papa, was also an appointed official with the city of New Orleans. At age 46, he suffered a stroke and was confined to a wheelchair for the last 10 years of his life. Josephine, Mimi, persevered, taking care of him, her daughters, and running the business with assistance from her mother and two of her four daughters. He passed in 1953. Mimi continued to run the business for 15 years before retiring.

I did not know then as I do now: she is my hero. When I think I am having a dark day, I think of her. I know I have courage, perseverance and leadership traits in my gene pool.

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Both of my daughters are professionals. One is an entrepreneur with a home-based business, the other worked her way up in the medical profession to regional director of clinic operations for Ochsner. They both knew what they wanted to do and worked hard to get there. I could not be prouder of each of them!

Congratulations to Social Northshore Magazine and Jen Meadows on publishing your fourth edition here on the Northshore. Thank you for inviting the St. Tammany Chamber to provide this editorial for your WE Social Magazine celebrating women in business on the Northshore and publishing in January 2021.

