

**WBENC WBE  
Stars share the  
secret to  
their success.**

# Shining Stars

By Tanya Isley

Despite a sometimes weak and hostile economy, American Express's 2013 State of Women Owned Business Report concludes that from 1997 to 2013, the number of women-owned companies increased by 59 percent, while revenues from those companies grew by 63 percent. Despite the odds, women business enterprises (WBEs) continue to be growing, sustainable and profitable businesses. Every year, 14 of these successful women business owners are feted by the **Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC)** as WBENC Stars at its Annual Summit & Salute to Women's Business Enterprises. This year marks the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the Summit and Salute, which was held this past March in New Orleans.

WBENC selects the best and brightest women business owners from its 14 Regional Partner Organizations (RPOs) once a year and honors them for their significant contributions to the U.S. economy. The honor is considered the nation's premier award for excellence among WBEs.

This group of distinguished individuals includes a number of women that *MBE* has covered before—including **Lisa Michelle Chretien**, founder and president of **Event-Mover**, who was featured in the March/April 2014 issue. Chretien, like most of the Stars, overcame obstacles in her life to achieve business success and now holds some of the most prominent contracts in the trade show industry.

**Pamela Prince-Eason**, president and CEO of WBENC, elaborates on the qualities that these Stars tend to have. "WBENC's 14 WBE Stars are exceptional leaders whose accomplishments make a powerful and positive impact on their industries and their communities," she says.

Although these 14 women have diverse backgrounds and come from a variety of industries, one common thread that runs through each of their stories is consistent involvement in their respective RPOs and their commitment to helping other women achieve success within the business community.

Here, in their own words, some of the 2014 WBENC Stars tell of their beginnings, their motivation and inspiration, what it means to be a WBENC Star, and why they shine bright.



Chretien



Prince-Eason

**Jacqueline Cleary, CEO  
Atlas Data Systems, LLC  
Women Presidents'  
Educational  
Organization—NY**



*Jacqueline (Jacquie) Cleary is the CEO and a founding partner of Atlas Data Systems, a thriving, New Jersey-based consulting firm that provides information technology services, business solutions, and clinical/scientific consulting to a broad range of Fortune 1000 companies.*

I'm always continuously helping and looking out for the women that I know within WBENC and my local region. So, for me personally, I'm very proud of [this award] because it recognizes that [helping other women succeed] is what I am about. It's not just, "Hey—I have a business and I'm trying to grow it."

I'm actively involved in the Women Presidents' Educational Organization (WPEO). I have my employees involved so there's a volunteerism that transcends beyond what I do. If my employees understand the organization, they can understand how to utilize the organization better for [us]. They also learn. There's an energy level they get from being a part of the region.

I just love cultivating team members. I get very excited about my team and building a high-powered, high performance team but also a team with really good synergy and energy. ◆

**Peggy Del Fabbro, CEO  
M. Davis & Sons, Inc.  
Women's Business Enterprise  
Council PA-DE-sNJ**



*Peggy Del Fabbro is the fifth generation CEO of MDavis & Sons, an industrial construction company that builds, installs and maintains facilities for national and international companies.*

I view [this] as an award for my entire MDavis team and what we've been able to accomplish the last 5 years—really in spite of the economy.

My involvement with my RPO, is a big part of this award. I am the Chair of the Envoy group and involved in multiple committees. In addition, I have participated in many RPO events—helping to organize them and speaking at them. Getting involved has been a tremendous experience for me. I feel that I get back just as much, if not more, than I put in.

I acquired my appreciation of intricate industrial design as a child when visiting paper mills, steel mills and recycling plants with my father. The generations that came before me inspires me today as I continue the MDavis tradition of discovering and driving the newest innovations in industrial construction.

My father is the single greatest influence on me in my work and life. Growing up, I saw how hard he worked and the integrity that he always did business with. He always told me that doing the right thing isn't always easy—but it's the best thing in the long run. ◆

**Lili Hall, President/CEO  
KNOCK, Inc.  
Women's Business Development Center—Chicago**



*Knock Inc. president and CEO Lili Hall is a seasoned pro in brand development, growth and protection and has also been named one of Ernst & Young LLP's Entrepreneurial Winning Women.*

To be recognized among such a great group of amazing, talented businesses is a huge honor, and humbling as well. I've been involved with WBENC the last few years—I was on the host committee for the National Conference in Minneapolis last year. We were involved in creating some of the marketing materials.

I love what we do and our product and our people

and our culture here at Knock. I feel fortunate to work with really passionate, hardworking, loyal people—our clients and the work that we do. I'm really proud of what we deliver every day to our clients.

I want to represent our women in my industry where I can. I can be more of a mentor and role model to up-and-coming talent. They can see somebody here running an organization or launching a business.

I was raised by a Brazilian mother and with older brothers. She told me that I could be anything—do anything. In my house, it was never boys against girls—we were the same. There was pressure on me to be independent, in part because she wasn't. My mother came from a third world country and a very patriarchal [background], her father was very much in charge of what was going to happen to her. Then she married my dad. So she didn't want me to go down the same path—but it was never about her being a victim. ◆

**Elizabeth Schmidt, CEO  
Atlas Tool, Inc.  
Women's Business Enterprise  
Council—Great Lakes**



*Elizabeth Schmidt emigrated as a teenager from Austria in search of a better life. Her experiences as the CEO of Atlas Tool for more than 50 years have provided her with the rewards she was seeking.*

We're a family business, and from the day we started we set the criteria to have continuous employment for our people and that we would be on the leading edge of technology, to supply a quality product for our customers.

We have a very experienced work crew and high technology—that allows us to try to be on the leading edge of what's going on in our industry. Fifty percent of our staff has 20 or more years of continuous service.

[Being named a WBENC Star] is quite an honor. I am active in our RPO and we have a wonderful leader who offers so many opportunities. I take advantage of those opportunities. I've learned a lot and I've been on some panels, as well, because of my experience. I think it's a wonderful organization and I try to support it. ♦

**Barbara I. Wichmann, CEO  
ARTEMIA Communications,  
Inc.  
Astra Women's Business  
Alliance**



*For almost 20 years, Barbara Wichmann and ARTEMIA Communications have been helping dozens of companies from Fortune 100/500 to early-stage startups successfully capture, sustain and grow market share through innovative and intelligent outreach, marketing and promotion, with a particular emphasis on reaching women and diverse audiences.*

Being a WBENC Star [gives me] a sense of appreciation because it's coming from peers, and we have some formidable WBEs and minority business enterprises in this group. We're all in the trenches and we know what it takes, we do it day in and day out, hopefully graciously. So to be a part of that group I was very pleased. It caught me by surprise.

Professionally, it validates what we're doing. In some ways,

**Royalyn Reid, President  
Consumer & Market  
Insights, LLC  
Women's Business Council  
Southwest**



*Royalyn Reid's journey has led her from a position as a scientist with Mary Kay Cosmetics to president of Consumer & Market Insights, LLC where she once ventured to Capitol Hill as a roundtable panelist for the United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.*

I take a lot of pride and honor in being selected because [our RPO is] very strong and robust.

I've worked and really grown my business over the years and we've seen a lot of success. In 2013, we were selected as WBE of the year for our category (\$5 million and under in sales). It's more than winning awards, [its about being] acknowledged for our accomplishments and efforts in business.

I'm very involved in our council. I'm on the board. I was on the strategic planning committee last year. I've been on the education committee before. I've been a co-chair of events and other committees. We work to do good business, but we also work to give back to the business community.

In life, I just love to make a difference in whatever I do. And I play to win. You can be competitive—I think being competitive equates to being a person of excellence. You can compete against yourself. You know, how else do we get better? So if I'm on a committee, I ask "Am I making an impact? Is the committee making an impact?"

That really motivates me to make a difference and be an impactful player not only on the business side but personally, as well. Giving back and being philanthropic are important to me. ♦

it validates my role on behalf of the company. And maybe it can enhance that comfort level that companies have when they first meet with us. Much like professional certifications would do. I'm grateful for that because we all need as many distinguishing points as we can to highlight our qualifications and our credibility and trustworthiness, too.

I really have made it my mission, this year, to support our RPO, to go further and, equally important, to provide value to other WBEs and minority businesses. Both the corporate participants and supporters want to see results and so do the women. When we go to conferences and meetings, it is of course with dual goals. One is to get educated on best practices but also to make connections that can lead to business. So being active and promoting the organization, I feel, is the proper thing for me to do. ♦

**Kim Sherrie Sawyer,  
President & General Counsel  
The Locator Services  
Group Ltd.  
Center for Women &  
Enterprise**

*For more than 19 years, Kim Sawyer, president & general counsel of The Locator Services Group Ltd. (TLSG) has grown her company to be the recognized industry leader in corporate asset recovery, specializing in the identification and recovery of unclaimed property for Fortune 500 companies. In 2013, Fortune magazine named TLSG as one of the 100 fastest growing inner city companies in the U.S.*



I am extremely flattered to be named as a 2014 WBENC Star. It means that my community views me as a leader who is influential and has used that power to make a positive impact on the community and the local economy.

When I was 16 years old, I was diagnosed with dysgraphia, which significantly impairs my ability to write and process information. Dysgraphia is a learning disability that often affects fine motor skills. As a result of my learning disability, my parents were told when I was in high school I would never go to college.

I did graduate college—and law school.

When I first began my legal career, I worked for a state agency, then as an associate in a large, downtown, Boston law firm and, later as the general counsel for an asset recovery firm. In all three environments, I was expected to “work” the same way as everyone else, which was impossible given the severity of my learning disability. I realized that the only way that I could succeed professionally and support myself financially was by creating a non-traditional business environment in which I could best process information and minimize my need to write. Ironically, it was my learning disability, in conjunction with the potential I realized in the asset recovery industry, which led me to start TLSG almost 20 years ago.

What has been the most rewarding about the growth and success of TLSG is my ability to give back to my community, through my charitable and political involvement, and my service as a role model and mentor for other women. ♦

**Jennifer Jeansonne, CEO  
Eagle Consulting, LLC  
Women's Business Enterprise  
Council South**

*Jennifer Jeansonne took over as CEO of her family's field supervision, project management and in-house engineering firm for drilling operations in 2005. Since then, she has expanded the company's operations and navigated it through the turbulence of the recent recession.*



As with everything in life, you get out of [business] what you put into it. I've been very active in my local RPO. I sit on a lot of committees. I'm currently the chairperson of the government contracting committee. I attend all of the national conferences and the local conferences for both WBENC South and for WBEA. I'm there—I'm showing up, participating. In the beginning it was for selfish reasons—I was going to make the contacts, to get doors opened. An odd thing happens when you start giving—you get things you never expected to receive.

Another woman business owner told me something that put an image in my head that I thought was just fantastic. She told me to remember when you're climbing the ladder of success, you have to reach down and pull the next woman up with you. I've experienced people pulling me from the top where they are. I'm also trying to do that with other women. Whether it's sitting down and giving advice, or introducing them to someone that I'm already doing business with that I think they can do business with, too.

The women in this group sincerely want everyone to succeed. It doesn't even matter if you're a competitor. If you go to one of these conferences, the energy is hard to describe. It's amazing. We're all there because we're businesswomen and want to do business. Everybody is genuinely nice and complimentary. It's never negative stuff. It's all about, “I want to succeed and I want you to succeed because if you can do it then I know I can do it. We can help each other.” ♦

**Tanya Isley** is an award-winning journalist with over 20 years' experience in traditional and online news media. She has managed the overall news media content strategy for more than 50 web sites. Tanya's work experience has included stints at The Manna Network, Cox Communications, Cygnus Business Media and WTVD-TV. Tanya has undergraduate degrees in journalism and history from North Carolina Central University and a graduate degree in interactive journalism from American University.



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