

# Women-owned businesses continue to grow and add to the growing economy

According to the Census Bureau's latest Survey of Minority-Owned Business Enterprises, women owned 26 percent of the nation's 20.8 million non-farm businesses – which translates into 5,417,034 firms. Those businesses also employed 7.1 million paid workers and generated \$818.7 billion in sales and receipts. The report also identifies California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Illinois as the states with the largest number of women-owned businesses.

In the state of Texas, self-employment by women increased by 6.1 percent, from 278,538 in 2002 to 295,559 in 2003 and represented 33 percent of self-employed persons. Women-owned businesses generated \$65.1 billion in revenues, employed 548,756 workers, and constituted 381,500 firms or 25 percent of all firms in 1997. Today, the economic culture of every community is impacted by the leadership of women. Women business leaders have the clout, determination, and connectedness to influence marketers, politicians, and the media.

In 1972, a group of women joined together to create what is now known as the Women's Division of the Plano Chamber of Commerce. Originally, this group was formed to be a supportive arm for the businessmen who were active in the chamber. Their role may seem strange to the professional women who are members today, but they were valiant women dedicated to supporting the men in their business community. Through the years Women's Division has evolved to become a group who supports the community as a whole – by joining together in common goals to enhance the lives of those around them. The organization is led by Chairman Minette Riordan, publisher of *Collin County Kids*, and a board of directors that oversees the operations of the organization.

Women's Division members were the originators of the 4th of July Fireworks display which continues to this day. At the beginning, this entertaining family event was held at the local high school stadium and brought citizens together to watch the evening splendor. After a few years, the city took over the event and it continues to be a spectacular Plano tradition we enjoy each 4th of July.

A commemorative plaque on 15th Street, just west of Central Expressway, signifies Women's Division involvement in the community and their interest in keeping Plano a beautiful and dynamic place to live, work and play.

Every year the Women's Division provides a scholarship for an employee of a nonprofit agency to participate in Leadership Plano – a way to demonstrate to the community their dedication to the development of future female leaders for all sectors of our city.

The mission of the Plano Chamber of Commerce is to provide resources to maximize business performance through advocacy, education and networking. The Women's Division puts the same emphasis on business women empowering business women through education, advocacy and networking. They are dedicated to providing a voice for women and women's business issues within the Plano Chamber of Commerce.

As a program of the Plano Chamber of Commerce, the Women's Division is a powerful alliance of women who share ideas, experiences, and goals; women who serve as role models and mentors; and women who provide networking opportunities for women in business.

Opportunities are provided and members are encouraged to develop their full potential as community leaders and civic volunteers. These business women promote Plano pride and enhance the quality of life in Plano through a

commitment to excellence in civic, cultural, economic, and educational affairs. They also serve as ambassadors for the work of the Plano Chamber of Commerce and the Plano community.

The 2006 goals reflect the mission statement: creating opportunities for women in business to grow together professionally and support each other through speakers at their lunches and smaller networking functions. A much-anticipated event is the upcoming procurement expo and educational breakout sessions, which are being planned in conjunction with the Business Development Committee's Success in Business Seminar featuring author Steve Kaplan, author of *Bag the Elephant: How to Win and Keep Big Customers*, on Oct 4.

Their monthly luncheons have grown to be an extremely beneficial and dynamic atmosphere for women to network together. Upcoming summer luncheon topics include the popular "Nothing But Networking," Financial Planning for Businesses, and How to Protect your Confidential Information.

If you're a member of the Plano Chamber of Commerce or interested in learning more, then we invite you to join one of the educational and entertaining monthly luncheons. The luncheons average 100+ attendees, so be sure to bring lots of business cards.

The Women's Division has established a strong, informed, connected, empowered network of women that has become a dynamic force in our business community today. Learn for yourself how valuable the Women's Division can be. Plan to attend the May luncheon. If you have questions or would like more information, please call the chamber at 972- 424-7547 or visit our Web site at [www.planochamber.org/womens](http://www.planochamber.org/womens).

*Mary Jo Dean was the 2006 chairperson of the board of the Plano Chamber of Commerce.*