

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

**Welcome!** to the NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER, a vehicle for communication for the National Association of Women Business Owners - Los Angeles Chapter (NAWBO-LA).

In this special issue, we focus on the **22nd Annual NAWBO-LA Leadership & Legacy Awards Honorees and Hall of Fame Inductees**, who will be recognized on Friday, March 14, 2008, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. All of the honorees and inductees have established a legacy of entrepreneurial excellence and contributed significantly to the community – and continue to demonstrate the *rising power* of women business owners as leaders and as stewards of a future above and beyond themselves.

- [22nd Annual NAWBO-LA Leadership & Legacy Awards Luncheon](#)
- **Honoree Profiles:**
  - [Leadership Award - Mimi Song](#)
  - [Legacy Award - Renee White Fraser, Ph.D.](#)
  - [Corporate Partner Award - Southern California Edison/Lynda Ziegler](#)
  - [Advocate Award - Maria Contreras-Sweet](#)
  - [Inspiration Award - Gisselle Acevedo](#)
  - [Rising Star Award - Natalie Cole](#)
  - [Hall of Fame Inductee - Marilyn Lewis](#)
  - [Hall of Fame Inductee - Mary Ann Mitchell](#)
  - [Hall of Fame Inductee - Valerie Red-Horse](#)

[CLICK HERE](#) for the full printable version

---

Check out the newly improved [NAWBO-LA homepage](#) that is designed to create an online portal experience that brings critical resources and information at your fingertips.

- 
- [NAWBO-LA Corporate Partners](#)
  - [Join](#) NAWBO-LA

---

### About the NAWBO-LA Online Newsletter

*The NAWBO-LA Online Newsletter is published six times yearly by NAWBO-LA and written by Mindy Berman/Mindy F. Berman Communications. The publication months are February, April, June, August, October and December. NAWBO-LA's Online Newsletter editor may be reached at [newsletter@nawbola.org](mailto:newsletter@nawbola.org).*

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | [info@nawbola.org](mailto:info@nawbola.org)

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

**Press Room**

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



**NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER  
FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE**

**22nd Annual NAWBO-LA Leadership & Legacy Awards Luncheon**

The 22nd Annual NAWBO-LA Leadership & Legacy Awards Luncheon, taking place Friday, March 14, 2008, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, will pay tribute to top achievers among women leaders who have established a legacy of entrepreneurial excellence and contributed significantly to Southern California .



One of the most noteworthy and anticipated business events in Los Angeles, the luncheon is expected to draw a powerhouse gathering of more than 1,200 business owners, community leaders, media, dignitaries and celebrities – all interested in recognizing the rising power of women entrepreneurs.

Emmy Award-winning journalist and current *Access Hollywood* weekend co-host and correspondent Shaun Robinson will serve as the mistress of ceremonies at the gala luncheon, where six women will receive prestigious NAWBO-LA awards (one on behalf of the Corporate Partner of the Year), and three more will be inducted into the NAWBO-LA Hall of Fame.

**NAWBO-LA: Rising**

The theme of the 2008 event, "**NAWBO LA: Rising**," speaks to the increasing power of women business owners and the growing impact of NAWBO-LA in economic, social and political spheres. The women to be recognized on March 14 epitomize the theme as they have not only risen above their own circumstances, but they are rising to the occasion every day as business leaders, and are raising the bar as stewards of a future above and beyond themselves.

"Women business owners represent a tide of entrepreneurship that is sweeping across the social landscape and shaping the business environment," said Helen Han, NAWBO-LA CEO. "Women are creating new definitions for ownership, success and prosperity in both the workplace and the community, and we want to give tribute to those women who are standing, reaching, growing, lifting and rising to **own their future**."

Added NAWBO-LA President-Elect/Event Chair Jane Skeeter, also the CEO of UltraGlas, Inc., "We look forward to celebrating both leadership and legacy on March 14. Each of the women selected to be honored at this year's luncheon has in her own way energized the entrepreneurial spirit of Los Angeles and established an important legacy for NAWBO-LA, the larger community of women entrepreneurs, and our society as whole."

Many innovative corporations support NAWBO-LA's efforts to create opportunities for women business owners through their sponsorship of the Leadership & Legacy Awards Luncheon. Union Bank of California, a NAWBO-LA corporate partner for more than a decade, will once again serve as the luncheon's Platinum (Presenting) Sponsor – a continuation of the bank's three-year pledge to do so in an unprecedented level of commitment.

"We made this pledge because we believe in partnerships that embrace, inspire and support both aspiring female entrepreneurs, as well as the established women business owners," said JoAnn Bourne, executive vice president with Union Bank. "NAWBO-LA's effort to serve as a catalyst for the success of women entrepreneurs is integral to the bank's mission to invest in the communities it serves. Working together, the economic landscape of Los Angeles County will change with the increase of thriving women-owned businesses."

Additional event sponsors include DeDominic & Associates (Legacy Partner); Southern California Edison (Diamond Sponsor); Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. (Silver Sponsor); and Hilton Hotels Corporation, Northrop Grumman and Wachovia Corporation (Bronze Sponsors).

For more information on the 2008 NAWBO-LA Leadership & Legacy Awards Luncheon, visit [www.nawbola.org](http://www.nawbola.org). Seating is limited at this "sellout" event and early registration is strongly encouraged.

SPONSORS	
<p><b>PRESENTING SPONSOR:</b></p> <p>Invest in you</p> 	<p><b>LEGACY PARTNER:</b></p> <p>De Dominic &amp; Associates</p>
<p><b>DIAMOND SPONSOR:</b></p> 	<p><b>SILVER SPONSOR:</b></p> <p><b>TOYOTA</b></p>

BRONZE SPONSORS:



WACHOVIA

*NORTHROP GRUMMAN*

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | info@nawbola.org

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

**Press Room**

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



**NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER  
FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE**

**Leadership Award**

*The Leadership Award recognizes an exemplary woman entrepreneur who demonstrates her leadership skills by example, is committed to entrepreneurial excellence and has achieved success well beyond the standards of her industry and the business community*



**Mimi Song**  
**President/CEO, Superior Grocers**

*"Listen to your inner voice, find your inner abilities and move forward."*

When it comes to lifting our businesses and communities, no one fits the bill like Mimi Song, president and chief executive officer of Superior Grocers.

Song came to the United States from South Korea in the late 1970s and opened her first grocery store in 1981. Employing her trademark values of partnership and teamwork, she has built Superior into the largest independently owned chain of grocery stores in Southern California, providing thousands of jobs and training opportunities while supporting school and youth programs with millions in donations.

**A Defining Moment**

Song's commitment to her employees and the surrounding community became even stronger during and after the 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest. During that time, Superior had four stores, with three of them located in the heart of the affected area, yet was one of the only businesses that did not experience any damage. In fact, Superior stores were the only ones remaining open to meet the community's essential needs, with the National Guard on hand to help manage long lines of customers.

The community's commitment to Superior was a testament to the company's business model: dedication to treating customers as partners and employing those within the community as part of the Superior "family." Recalling this moment in Superior's history, Song reflected that she would "always be grateful to our employees and customers for their commitment and the protection they provided our stores during that time."

This was a defining moment for Song, as it bolstered her strength and desire to become an even more dedicated community-oriented leader. It was at that moment that her heart said, "I would really like to pay back our community." And in true "Mimi fashion," she did. Creating the nonprofit organization Community Re-Engineering Inc., these past 10 years have brought with it more than \$1.2 million for elementary schools, high schools and youth programs within the neighborhoods.

Song further contributes to the community by serving as a member of the Clorox Hispanic Advisory Council, City of Hope Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee for the Asian Pacific Legal Center.

When it comes to employees, Song mostly hires from within the local area, noting that about 70% of her employees have never had "regular" jobs before. Today Superior employs close to 5,000 associates, and partners with local training schools and workforce development agencies to provide numerous job trainings, as well as scholarships for educational endeavors, to help employees advance in their careers.

She recognizes the fact that many in the inner city do not have the job opportunities or mentors that could make a significant difference in their lives. But she's rising to the occasion to change that. Commenting on her own beginnings as an immigrant in America, Song believes in the community, saying, "When I came here, I had limited ability in English, but I was able to come this far. I know they can do the same, and I want to help them accomplish just as much, if not more."

Song's outstanding leadership already has brought her much well-deserved recognition, including the 2005 Women in Education Award from Los Angeles Valley College for developing ongoing training programs for local communities; the 2007 Pioneer Woman Award from the Los Angeles City Commission on the Status of Women for her ongoing commitment and contributions to Los Angeles communities; and the 2007 Spirit Award, presented by the Mexican American Grocers Association (MAGA) for her ongoing commitment to education and partnership with MAGA.

**A Brave Heart**

Even with all of her accomplishments, Song continually challenges herself to remain a good leader and role model for the community, and especially for the next generation. She sees her NAWBO-LA Leadership Award as a responsibility to both herself and her organization to keep improving, and credits NAWBO-LA for opening more channels of communication to help future women business owners succeed.

She continues to raise the bar for herself and her company by setting new goals each year. By the end of this year, Superior will operate more than 30 stores, and aims to move from a \$900 million a year company to over the \$1 billion mark. "My and my Superior family's goals are always the same. I know we're going to make it. That is our Superior goal."

Song credits Superior's long-term success to the advice she frequently gives to her employees: "You must have a brave heart and confidence. If you don't have a brave heart you cannot take action. Listen to your inner voice, find your inner abilities and move forward."

She added that she is "fortunate to have become a woman grocer" on a large scale in Southern California and could not be where she is today "if it wasn't for the ongoing dedication, loyalty and support from our Superior family." But she has become so much more than a grocer. She has risen up and become a true leader to all of those around her.

**About Superior Grocers:** Superior Grocers is the largest independently owned chain of grocery stores in Southern California. Its success is largely attributed to its low-cost philosophy to provide inexpensive high-quality products with service and care. For over 26 years, it has been a part of local communities to save shoppers money, and to be a generous corporate citizen by supporting local neighborhoods through various charitable donations. The company is proud of its long history of servicing the community and the diversity of the people who shop and work in its stores – a reflection of Southern California itself. For more information: <http://superiorgrocers.com>.

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | [info@nawbola.org](mailto:info@nawbola.org)

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Legacy Award

*The Legacy Award recognizes an individual who has had a significant impact on the well-being of her community and who has had the foresight and generosity to recognize that her success is best savored when she "pays it forward." This award honors a woman who through her leadership and vision is changing lives today, and at the same time impacting generations to come*



**Renee White Fraser, Ph.D.**  
President/CEO, Fraser Communications

*"There's a magic quality behind giving back to people. When you give back there's an energy and a sense of accomplishment you get that really propels you to the next level."*

One of NAWBO-LA's guiding lights, 2008 Legacy Award honoree Renee White Fraser, Ph.D. continually demonstrates how using her success to give back creates "prosperity to greatness" by propelling the next generation of women entrepreneurs into far-reaching economic, social and political spheres of influence.

Last year, Fraser became a Legacy Ambassador with her \$20,000 contribution to the Legacy Society, founded under the Enterprise Institute of NAWBO-LA (a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization) to establish a place – both virtual and physical – where all women entrepreneurs can access the resources they need to grow their businesses, wield their influence and effect change.

Beyond that, Fraser continues to have an enduring impact on both NAWBO-LA and the Enterprise Institute, instilling in all those she touches the importance of legacy-building as a necessary ingredient to success and leadership.

### A Magic Quality Behind Giving

"Opening doors to opportunities is a very rewarding aspect of what you get to do with NAWBO-LA. It gives you a sense of your own personal power and the ability leaders have to make long-term sustainable changes in the community," Fraser said, adding, "Women have to help other women. We need to reach out and lift as we climb."

This approach also brings benefits to the giver. She explained, "There's a magic quality behind giving back to people. When you give back there's an energy and a sense of accomplishment you get that really propels you to the next level."

Fraser noted that in engaging with other women who find themselves in difficult circumstances, she realizes that we share so much in common. She quotes Confucius – "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall" – in citing her admiration for women who with the odds stacked against them still work hard to take care of their families and make better lives for themselves. She added, "You hold yourself to a higher standard as a result of seeing that in others."

In reaching for ever-higher standards, Fraser continues to demonstrate how giving back embodies the idea of linear reciprocity, and to raise the bar to create a legacy for future women entrepreneurs and leaders.

A past president of both NAWBO-LA and the Enterprise Institute of NAWBO-LA, Fraser also serves on the Women's Leadership Board of the Harvard University/John F. Kennedy School of Government (as vice chair), and as a board member for Volunteers of America, Youth Mentoring Connection (which is dedicated to improving the lives of at-risk youth through mentoring with caring adults) and WISE and Healthy Aging (a premier service organization for seniors and caregivers).

In addition, Fraser – head of her own renowned advertising and marketing agency – co-founded the Minority Advertising Training Program, a first-of-its kind advertising industry program from which 1,500 young individuals have graduated.

Since founding Fraser Communications in 1992, she has increased her clients to include Toyota, East West Bank, the County and City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles World Airports, ProMax and Aids Healthcare Foundation. Nearly one-third of her client base is in the nonprofit arena for which the firm conducts social marketing campaigns like Flex Your Power and Be Water Wise, as well as works to build stronger brand identity for organizations like United Way.

Today, Fraser estimates she spends up to a quarter of each week making connections and giving advice and counsel. And yet, on a practical level, that helps her firm too. She explained, "When you build relationships you're building business, and all business stems from relationships. There's a reciprocation that occurs."

She never envisioned running a \$40 million business with 35 employees, yet the firm's success should come as no surprise. Fraser Communications ranks in the Top 10 in employee satisfaction among mid-sized companies in Los Angeles, a tribute to the way she cares for and nurtures her team.

She takes her mentoring role – both inside and outside of her company – very seriously. "As you rise, one of the roles you see yourself in is connecting to other powerful people and

helping others," she said. This carries over to her personal life, with her greatest pride being her three daughters, whom she calls "the testament to me as a human being."

#### **An Opportunity for Visibility**

For all of her accomplishments, Fraser is humbled to receive NAWBO-LA's 2008 Legacy Award and "appreciates the recognition it symbolizes" – particularly after the award previously went to Patty DeDominic, someone she greatly admires. DeDominic helped establish the Legacy Society with an unprecedented \$1 million challenge grant in 2006.

Looking ahead, Fraser wants to ensure that increasing numbers of women business owners see the value of NAWBO-LA in moving more women into leadership roles and serving as a powerful force in the community. This work remains critical, she added, to push more women – past the current 15%-16% range – onto boards of Fortune 500 companies and into senior levels of power in corporate America and into political office.

"Women's brains work differently. We see the interconnectedness of ideas and people and treat people differently. I want that perspective to be more influential in how policies are crafted and how the world operates," she explained.

NAWBO-LA, she said, puts women "at the table" and gives them a voice. For members, "it gives you the opportunity to make yourself more visible and become more of a brand name."

For these women, the woman who serves as a true testament to the ability to create a legacy for others every day concluded with wise advice: "Seize the moment. Be audacious. Don't think too small. Dream big and it will happen."

**About Fraser Communications:** Fraser Communications is a full-service advertising, marketing and public relations agency focused on delivering compelling communications that produce results for its clients. It is currently the third-largest woman-owned company, and ninth-fastest-growing private company, in Los Angeles. For more information: <http://www.frasercommunications.com>.

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | info@nawbola.org

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Corporate Partner of the Year Award

*The Corporate Partner of the Year Award recognizes a corporate member that has proven its commitment to our organization and women business owners through its longstanding commitment and investment in NAWBO-LA and the Enterprise Institute*



**Southern California Edison**  
**Represented By: Lynda Ziegler, Senior Vice President**

*"It's critical that women network and support each other. We need to be a voice in the broader context of the environment we live in."*

The 2008 Corporate Partner of the Year shines brightly as an "energy company of the future" – one that strongly supports diversity in its management ranks; continually expands contracting opportunities for women, minority and disabled-veteran enterprises (WMDVBEs); and serves as an environmental steward through innovative programs that support a better quality of life throughout the region.

Clearly, Southern California Edison (SCE) is rising to the 21st-century challenges in the utility industry in many ways. "We look at diversity as a key to the success of our business. We need to look and feel and think like the diverse communities we serve," said Lynda Ziegler, senior vice president of customer service. She added, "We're the company that provides the power that drives the lives and economy of Southern California, and feel it's our responsibility to do that in an environmentally friendly manner."

The company's commitment to diversity is reflected in its internal support of women in leadership positions. Of the 14 company executives at the senior vice president level and above, five (including Ziegler) are women.

In her senior vice president role, Ziegler is responsible for customer services to SCE's 4.8 million customers, including customer experience, industry-leading demand-side management programs and advanced metering, as well as customer-facing operations, phone center activities, field services, account management and local public affairs.

Besides handling her extensive job responsibilities, Ziegler supports SCE's Women's Roundtable, an employee networking group she plans to help reinvigorate and expand in 2008. Beyond that, she served for over three years on the board of directors of Leadership California, an organization dedicated to educating high-level women executives on California policy issues and encouraging women's leadership in policymaking and public office. Finally, she's working to help develop an energy industry women's network to assist women in continuing to become stronger and more senior leaders in this industry.

Ziegler believes that women bring a different and valuable perspective to decision-making, leading to "a more robust decision criteria." She commends NAWBO-LA, which SCE supports year-round, for playing a crucial role in advancing women's economic, social and political influence. "It's critical that women network and support each other," she explained. "We need to be a voice in the broader context of the environment we live in."

### Supplier Diversity Successes

As another way to help women's business endeavors, SCE ensures it maximizes opportunities for women business owners (as well as minority and disabled-veteran enterprises) to build their competitiveness – such as through the annual "Business Edge" Workshop Series – and participate in the utility's purchasing and contracting opportunities.

In 2006 SCE achieved its 22.5% WMDVBE goal, with an all-time 29-year program history high of nearly \$545 million in WMDVBE procurement expenditures. Of that amount, \$239 million was procurement dollars spent on women-owned businesses.

"We are a part of the fabric of the communities we serve," said Ziegler. "We think it's critically important to purchase from the communities we serve and support women- and minority-owned businesses."

### Stewardship for Tomorrow

Supporting the community also means working toward reducing impacts on the environment, and bringing a cleaner tomorrow to future generations.

SCE is charging ahead in these areas, operating the most successful energy efficiency program of any U.S. utility and leading the nation in purchases of renewable energy. During the past five years alone, SCE's energy efficiency programs have enabled its customers to save enough energy to power 500,000 homes for an entire year, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by more than 2 million tons – the equivalent of removing 250,000 cars from the

road.

Looking forward, in 2009 SCE plans to begin installing new "smart" meters that will provide an enhanced level of communication with customers and help them use energy more efficiently and wisely.

"We're really at the beginning of what I think is a huge sea change in the energy industry," noted Ziegler. "We look at SCE as the energy company of the future – one that powers people's lives but does it in a way that protects the environment."

**About Southern California Edison:** An Edison International (NYSE:EIX) company, Southern California Edison is the largest electric utility in California, serving a population of more than 13 million via 4.8 million customer accounts in a 50,000-square-mile service area within central, coastal and Southern California. For more information: [www.sce.com](http://www.sce.com).

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | info@nawbola.org

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Advocate Award

*The Advocate Award recognizes a leader who demonstrates a strong commitment to propelling women into economic, social and/or political spheres of power and is dedicated to the creation of a greater society for all*



**Maria Contreras-Sweet**  
Founder/Chairwoman, PROMÉRICA Bank

*"We mustn't forget about building personal wealth for ourselves. Economic power is essential for women. Even if we're going to give it away, it's important to show we can also acquire it and control it."*

After immigrating to the United States from Mexico as a child, Maria Contreras-Sweet's mother told her she wanted her daughter to become successful and work in an office as a secretary. She did that all right, becoming California's first-ever Latina Cabinet Secretary, heading the state's Business, Transportation and Housing Agency for five years.

But Contreras-Sweet didn't stop there in reaching higher than her mother had dreamed – and in carrying out the values instilled by both her mother and her grandmother, who told her, "It's not about the titles you have, it's about what you do with the titles you have."

What she's doing with her title today as founder and chairwoman of the board of PROMÉRICA Bank, the first Latino-owned business bank in California in more than three decades, is advocating for entrepreneurs by providing access to capital to generate jobs and expand opportunity, in the process helping clients realize their dreams of building wealth – "construyendo patrimonios."

She noted of her philosophy: "How can I become the change agent and begin a generation of empowered women who know how to access and master cash management? This bank is different in that respect. It reflects my values in that it comes with a consultative relationship. We're now able to help entrepreneurs like my mother. We can take that history and sense of understanding and bring it all to bear at the bank."

By serving the Latino community, the bank clearly is meeting a need: According to Contreras-Sweet, the Los Angeles area boasts the highest number of Latino-owned businesses in the country. Latino businesses generate \$23 billion in annual sales, more than a third of all businesses are Latino-owned, and 73% of all California Latino-owned businesses are located in Los Angeles County.

In its first year of operation, PROMÉRICA Bank – which means "Promise of America" – grew 100%, already helping to establish additional wealth and create a more financially knowledgeable community, which Contreras-Sweet sees as critical to expanding the middle class, especially among women.

"We mustn't forget about building personal wealth for ourselves," she said. "Economic power is essential for women. Even if we're going to give it away, it's important to show we can also acquire it and control it."

This financial power, she said, becomes liberating, allowing women to then turn their attention to other endeavors, such as community service.

### The NAWBO-LA Connection

When she decided to launch PROMÉRICA Bank, Contreras-Sweet put her philosophy to work. She started by calling her girlfriends and their families, looking for an investment of \$500,000. Despite the financial risk involved, 25 friends – many of them NAWBO-LA members – provided \$1.3 million, and they in turn brought in 400 more families to complete the bank's financing.

Just as NAWBO-LA helped her make the contacts that allowed her to launch her bank, she thinks the organization "superbly" facilitates the connection that is critical for all women business owners, and appreciates the role NAWBO-LA plays in advocating for opportunities for women.

Of her 2008 Advocate Award, Contreras-Sweet said, "This one is really significant, because the common thread through most of my work is how to empower the businesswoman."

### A History of Advocacy

Contreras-Sweet's career accomplishments and activities to support women entrepreneurs read like a primer on how to raise the bar as a steward for both current and future generations.

During her tenure in state government, she managed a \$14 billion budget and a workforce of 42,000-plus. In just five years, her many achievements included:

- Creating the Department of Managed Health Care, which regulates HMOs.
- Leading the implementation of Proposition 46, a \$2.1 billion housing fund, to stimulate the state's economy.
- Launching Access California, a program to deploy resources into target communities of underserved women.

- Chairing The Infrastructure Commission, which published guidelines to set forth eight building blocks for a strong economy.

Before joining state government, in addition to holding corporate positions, Contreras-Sweet served as a founding director of The California Endowment, a statewide health foundation dedicated to expanding access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities. She's also the founding president of HOPE (Hispanas Organized for Political Equality), and serves on the Women's Leadership Board at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the International Women's Forum.

For all of her unprecedented advocacy, Contreras-Sweet takes perhaps her greatest pride in her family, including her three grown children, who are carrying on her mantle of community service. She explained, "The most gratifying thing is to see we have done a nice job of not only creating change in the community, but also of creating another generation so the change can be systemic and more enduring."

**About PROMÉRICA Bank:** PROMÉRICA Bank (OTCBB: PMRA), a full-service commercial bank, was formed to serve the Los Angeles business community and become the leading financial services provider for Latino and women entrepreneurs. As the first woman-formed business bank to debut in Los Angeles in decades, PROMÉRICA Bank is dedicated to building family wealth by empowering businesswomen with the requisite financial services and capital necessary for the success of their business. PROMÉRICA Bank offers the latest bank technology, such as CapturePro, enabling entrepreneurs to deposit checks remotely. PROMÉRICA Bank has recently been approved as an SBA Preferred Lender, and its SBA Express program helps to accelerate loan processing for businesses by reducing the timeline from weeks to days in a consultative environment. Member of the FDIC. For more information: [www.promericabank.com](http://www.promericabank.com) or contact Vanessa Velez at (213) 787-2835.

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | [info@nawbola.org](mailto:info@nawbola.org)

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Inspiration Award

*The Inspiration Award recognizes someone who has made a tremendous impact on those around her and serves as a true role model for others to follow*



**Gisselle Acevedo**  
President/CEO, Para Los Niños

*"It's important to look at a child as a whole and address the mind, body and spirit. That's how you raise the bar. Through education and through social services, we're creating and directing the future of these children's lives and the future of the city's life."*

Gisselle Acevedo readily acknowledges that she could have been a statistic at any moment. Her mother and she immigrated to the United States from Costa Rica not just once, but twice, penniless and homeless. They lived in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Los Angeles, and faced many daunting challenges.

But Acevedo's mother instilled in her that education equaled survival. Acevedo worked extraordinarily hard, eventually earning bachelor's, master's and law degrees, and putting her skills, knowledge and drive to work in a variety of careers with a common theme – helping to support and inspire children, whom she calls "the economic, social and political foundation for the city."

"The strength I bring to this community is my experience," she noted. "I'm really proud of not just having survived it; it's deeply who I am."

Today she heads Para Los Niños, a nonprofit organization that serves 3,500 children a day – children like she once was – through seven preschools, a charter school, a mental health center, a teen center, 14 after-school programs, a family preservation/service unit, and youth workforce development and investment programs.

"I feel so privileged to care for these kids in the way I want," Acevedo said. "It's important to look at a child as a whole and address the mind, body and spirit. That's how you raise the bar. Through education and through social services, we're creating and directing the future of these children's lives and the future of the city's life."

### Emotional Self-Awareness

Her distinguished career has seen her work as an elementary school teacher in some of the toughest neighborhoods in Los Angeles, as an attorney representing the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities and mental illness, and as an executive at AT&T Broadband and the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

Prior to joining Para Los Niños, she served as president and general manager of the Los Angeles edition of *Hoy*, the Spanish-language newspaper owned by the Tribune Company. Previously, she served as vice president of public affairs for the *Los Angeles Times* and president of the *Los Angeles Times* Foundation, where she directed public affairs activities, including civic engagement, student journalism programs, and the *Times'* corporate philanthropy. During this tenure, she brought the concept of the Reading By 9 program to NAWBO-LA, enabling the two organizations to combine resources in an "amazing partnership" to help make more books available to children and improve their reading skills.

In all of her positions, she's focused on the logical and academic side of running an organization, and on the emotional side as well. "Don't lose your compassion," she advised. "Part of the journey is looking deep into yourself so you don't make a decision just because it's there to be made, but because you really understand its impact."

Like many other highly successful women, Acevedo believes that women bring a different perspective to business than men – and she applauds that. She sits on several boards, including The John F. Kennedy School of Government, Women's Leadership Board and the Executive Service Corp. of Southern California, as well as for Farmers Insurance Company, Health Net and Cal Fed Bank. In her role as a member of the corporate boards, she still often is one of the few women in the room.

But that allows her to utilize what she calls "an emotional self-awareness that is almost a God-given right to women," adding, "Come to the table with your BA and then expand that with your MBA in life."

### Compassion, Humility and Strength

Acevedo believes that women business owners have another important role to play – as a role model for little girls who need to see real images of successful women of all cultures. She wants today's women leaders to help instill in the next generation what she's instilling in the children at Para Los Niños and in her 15-year-old daughter, Noelle: The importance of having compassion and humility without losing a sense of strength and belief in self.

Young girls "need role models and need to have contact with successful women so they can aspire to be that," she said. She's grateful to NAWBO-LA for not only its ongoing work to empower the women leaders of today and tomorrow, but also for the Inspiration Award, which allows her to further share the uplifting story of Para Los Niños with women business owners and others in the community who care about the children who need their own seat at the table.

As she said of the award, "It's really recognition that no matter where women go, the issue of children and the plight of children are still relevant in their lives."

**About Para Los Niños:** This nonprofit family service organization is designed to bring children from some of Los Angeles' most challenging communities out of poverty and onto brighter, more successful futures. Since opening its first facility in 1980, Para Los Niños has grown to serve more than 5,000 families each year at 21 sites throughout Pico-Union, Central, East, West and South Los Angeles, South El Monte and Ontario. For more information: [www.paralosninos.org](http://www.paralosninos.org).

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | [info@nawbola.org](mailto:info@nawbola.org)

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Rising Star Award

*The Rising Star is a woman entrepreneur who has established a critical milestone in her business and has displayed high potential for enduring entrepreneurial success*



**Natalie Cole**  
CEO/Publisher, *Our Weekly Newspaper*

*"Having an education allows one to advance beyond the door and approach the table of opportunity. Once at the table, your demonstrated judgment, communication, negotiation style, image and more will tell others either you are or are not a member who is qualified to sit among them. But it all begins with your level of confidence, which generally is heightened by your level of education and understanding as to 'how the world works.' With this understanding of the world, you are inspired to activism to help others and figure out where you can best contribute."*

This year's Rising Star honoree is inspiring growth and progress and bridging resources to people with *Our Weekly*, a newspaper that directly addresses the topics and issues facing Los Angeles' African American communities and serves as an oasis for learning and entertaining while enabling voices within that community to be heard.

Upon launching the paper in 2004, Natalie Cole said, "The Los Angeles African American community has been tragically underserved in terms of news sources whose content meets our needs. *Our Weekly* will fill that void and address this powerful niche market head on."

Today, speaking of the success of *Our Weekly* – which became the largest African American newspaper in Southern California within six months – she added, "I am most proud of the fact that from concept to business plan to final product to market, I had exclusive and absolute ownership of *Our Weekly*. I recognize the value in having access to a diverse group of resources and voices as appropriate; however, having the opportunity to assemble fragmented concepts into something tangible that is ultimately informative, educational and a resource to the community was and continues to be incredibly gratifying."

### A Case Study in Perseverance

Reaching this gratifying milestone in her career has not been easy. Though born in New York, Cole grew up in South Central Los Angeles, an area that continues to be economically depressed, home to many Angelenos who live below the poverty line, and a refuge for gangs and drug dealers. It's also where Cole contracted environmental cancer, though that wasn't discovered until many years later.

"In spite of all this and by the grace of my higher power, I navigated my way through this myriad of death, danger and poison to finish college and land a decent job at the *Los Angeles Times*, which would be my training ground for nearly three decades and ultimately pave the road which I travel today. I sum it up in one word: perseverance."

But she did more than just persevere. While still working her way through college, at the *Times* she rose through the ranks to hold several senior-level assignments. Her accomplishments included serving as the brainchild of "The Kids' Reading Page," formerly known as "Kid Sense." At the time she left the paper, she held the only dual-director titles, as director of classified sales for the *Recycler*, and as director of inside sales for the *Times*, managing an annual revenue portfolio of approximately \$100 million.

Prior to launching *Our Weekly*, she also worked as associate publisher for *LA Weekly*, where she helped change the face of alternative news by being directly involved in the launch of an innovative magazine-style cover for *LA Weekly* that is being duplicated across the country.

With her experience and successes, this married mother of four now is working to help others reach new heights – for example, she sits on the boards of the United Negro College Fund, the Los Angeles African American Women's Public Policy Institute and the National Black Business Council, plus recently was appointed as a commissioner to the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency Board.

In December 2007 Cole launched yet another organization, Urban Media Foundation, a 501(c)(3) with the goal of educating and training South Los Angeles youth on journalism, the business side of newspapers and the technology of newspapers, all of which provide expertise which is transferable to other industries.

### Access to the Table of Opportunity

The key to future success for women and minority entrepreneurs, she noted, lies with education.

"Having an education allows one to advance beyond the door and approach the table of opportunity," she said. "Once at the table, your demonstrated judgment, communication, negotiation style, image and more will tell others either you are or are not a member who is qualified to sit among them.

"But it all begins with your level of confidence, which generally is heightened by your level of education and understanding as to 'how the world works.' With this understanding of the world, you are inspired to activism to help others and figure out where you can best contribute. We should all use our areas of specialty to influence and inspire growth and

progress in others."

Just as she is using her outstanding abilities to inspire growth and progress in African American communities, so, she said, is NAWBO-LA using its expertise to increase the power of women entrepreneurs. She is "eternally grateful" for being honored as the 2008 Rising Star from an organization that "is a pivotal element of our support system and continued existence as business leaders and owners. NAWBO-LA gives us easy access to various resources, including news, data, information and people, all of which can be springboards into our next level(s) of growth."

**About *Our Weekly*:** *Our Weekly* is the largest verified distribution paper in the African American community in Southern California, with 50,000 copies distributed each Thursday, of which 30,000 are delivered door-to-door and 20,000 are distributed commercially. For more information: <http://ourweekly.com>.

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | [info@nawbola.org](mailto:info@nawbola.org)

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Hall of Fame Inductee

*Each year, NAWBO-LA inducts into our Hall of Fame women who represent the quintessential entrepreneur who strives for excellence in everything that she does and has given back extensively to her community*



**Marilyn Lewis**  
Founder, Kate Mantilini

*"Find where the education is, work where you will learn, start at the bottom and learn every part of what you think is your dream. It's all out there. All you have to do is be a part of it."*

A true original and free spirit, Marilyn Lewis brings color, creativity and vision into the boardrooms she inhabits. From groundbreaking restaurateur to professor to dress designer to motion picture and television producer to author and more, her accomplishments are remarkable – and her life journey is filled with a never-ending commitment to teach and pass on the lessons she's learned to the next generation, creating a legacy for those who will follow in her footsteps.

Along with her husband of 57 years, Harry (a well-known actor in the 1940s), Lewis founded and built the extraordinarily successful Hamburger Hamlet chain, starting in 1950 with the first site on the Sunset Strip just west of the Whiskey A Go-Go.

### The American Dream Begins

Needing to staff the restaurant and wanting to bring people into her dream – the American dream – Lewis put out a call to Pullman train waiters from the Santa Fe Super Chief line and asked them to send their wives, daughters and sisters. At the time, well before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, she felt that African American women rightly deserved the opportunity to move into the mainstream of business. Her initial instinct was based on the fine service the Pullman waiters provided on the train lines, as well as on the fact that these women were "missing" in the mainstream of the economy.

The young women came, not knowing what to expect. Lewis put them through a self-developed "waitress school," complete with lessons on diction and elocution, voice modulation, poise, suggestive selling, makeup, grooming and more.

They were so eager to learn, and Lewis was eager to teach. But it was still a difficult transition. On the day the restaurant opened, some narrow-minded locals saw the wait staff and threw tomatoes at the windows. Lewis told her team to stay focused and keep working – that these jobs would earn them money they could use to buy houses and put their kids through college. That was her mantra, and they won.

"Life is not designed for our comfort, but for our struggle," she noted. "I learned that in the struggle there's growth."

Many of those first waitresses stayed with Hamburger Hamlet for 30-plus years, and did purchase homes and send their kids to college. In her book, *Marilyn, Are You Sure You Can Cook? He Asked* (2000), one of the waitresses, Esther Crayton, wrote, "There you were, opening doors to us who could go no other place and be employed as a waitress because of the color of our skin...What a tremendous blessing you all have been by touching so many lives in a positive and productive manner." Crayton, who will attend this year's Leadership & Legacy Awards Luncheon, added that until Lewis put out the call, African American women were never invited to work west of Western Avenue unless it was as a domestic.

The Hamburger Hamlet story is well-known from there. The original location became an entertainment industry favorite, and new sites opened throughout the nation. But Lewis had more to accomplish – and more to give.

In the 1960s she launched the Cardinali design label, which became instantly recognized by high-end stores and attracted attention from the likes of Marlo Thomas for her starring role in "That Girl" and of Nancy Reagan (both before and during her tenure as First Lady). Lewis joined Reagan, along with Greer Garson and Joan Didion, in receiving the *Los Angeles Times* Woman of the Year Award in 1968 (a year after she began Cardinali), chosen by the founder herself, Buffy Chandler.

### The American Dream Continues

Lewis' next venture took her back to being a teacher, this time in a more "traditional" setting. For a year she taught a marketing course called "An American Dream: Owning Your Own Business," at American University in Washington, DC. To this day she calls it a lifetime highlight, noting, "It was just thrilling to teach these kids that capitalism was not a dirty word." She walked the talk, taking a dozen students and putting them to work in all capacities in her restaurants as part of a mentoring and internship program.

Education, Lewis noted, serves as the key for today's women to achieve greater economic, social and political influence.

"Find where the education is, work where you will learn, start at the bottom and learn every part of what you think is your dream," she said. "No matter how lowly the job, I enjoyed more than anything learning what not to do when your first opportunity to prove yourself arose."

She added, "It's all out there. All you have to do is be a part of it."

Lewis and her husband, of course, continue to be a part of it. They sold all of the Hamburger Hamlets in 1987, but have since opened two Kate Mantilini restaurants (in Beverly Hills and Woodland Hills), as well as Gardens on Glendon in Westwood. Lewis' "greatest thrill" now is mentoring and counseling her two sons, Adam and David, as they run the restaurants in the tradition she and her husband established – which means trying to "achieve as close to perfection as we can on every level."

Her outstanding career has earned Lewis many accolades, but she greatly appreciates "the wonderful sense of recognition for women by women" that her NAWBO-LA Hall of Fame induction brings. She looks at NAWBO-LA as a very "major, huge, guiding light," and as an organization that supports the mantra she developed and lives by every day as she continues to show others what it means to rise up and stand tall:

*The dream of owning your own business is a real pursuit  
A pursuit of happiness for sure  
But in the end it is the endless pursuit of possibilities  
It's like an oath that I carry around  
We must be challenged  
We must prove ourselves to ourselves  
We must learn to be responsible  
We must prove to be accountable  
We are really the challenged people  
We must learn, study, teach  
We must listen, be heard, network, create and set our own style  
We must make a choice to stay ahead, or to be pragmatic  
Most of all, the passion must be there and you must know when that passion is gone*

**About Kate Mantilini and Gardens on Glendon:** The original Kate Mantilini, located in Beverly Hills, offers an extensive menu in an avant-garde setting. The newer site, in Woodland Hills, opened in 2003. Gardens on Glendon provides a majestic dining experience and often hosts entertainment, corporate and private parties. For more information: [www.gardensonglendon.com](http://www.gardensonglendon.com).

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | info@nawbola.org

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Hall of Fame Inductee

*Each year, NAWBO-LA inducts into our Hall of Fame women who represent the quintessential entrepreneur who strives for excellence in everything that she does and has given back extensively to her community*



**Mary Ann Mitchell**  
President/CEO, CC-OPS, Inc.

*"Being human is more important than being important. If you treat people right and respect and acknowledge them it's so beneficial in so many ways. If you create that loyalty people will go to bat for you every time."*

Mary Ann Mitchell's challenges in starting her own business more than 20 years ago continue to shape her passion to mentor and provide opportunities for budding women and minority entrepreneurs.

Armed with a degree in business administration/finance, she still had difficulty landing a job in male-dominated firms. She tried her hand at running cosmetology and catering businesses, but they didn't prove a good fit. She then accepted a job at Hughes Aircraft Company, where she rose to operations manager. Still feeling the entrepreneurial spirit, she decided to launch her own technology business.

Acceptance proved difficult. "I had no credibility as a woman," she said. "People were very skeptical." But she set her expectations high and "became immune to 'no,'" even as she balanced starting a business with raising two kids. The results? Today her company, Computer Consulting Operations Specialists, Inc. (CC-OPS), is a \$40 million-plus business with 325 employees and a stellar reputation among its commercial and government sector clients, including some of NAWBO-LA's corporate partners.

Mitchell takes pride that she still employs the first person she hired and services the first customer she gained. "People are so important to me," she noted. "I've created loyalty with my employee base and my customers. They trust me and that's an accomplishment."

She added, "Being human is more important than being important. If you treat people right and respect and acknowledge them it's so beneficial in so many ways. If you create that loyalty people will go to bat for you every time."

### Passion and Determination

Mitchell's outstanding career is filled with examples of her putting that philosophy into action and "going to bat" for others.

As chair of the National Black Business Council 501(c)(6) and the Institute of the National Black Business 501(c)(3), she facilitates programs to support the growth of minority-owned businesses, enhance urban economic development and improve the financial literacy of underserved youth in disproportionately poor and minority parts of the greater Los Angeles area.

One such program, focused on Crenshaw High School, helps hundreds of students "break the cycle" of illiteracy, teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol. Another, implemented with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, works to increase educational awareness, training and employment readiness for both students and adults.

Mitchell also points proudly to her Youth Entrepreneur Program, which each year provides entrepreneurial training, financial literacy, business and life skills to about 150 underserved youth ages 11-17. As Mitchell noted, it's too late to start talking about these issues when kids turn 18. "We've got to start thinking about what happens 10 years from now. We have got to have a qualified workforce," she explained.

"I love that I'm making a difference in people's lives," Mitchell said, adding that it's critical for today's women business owners and leaders to share their experience and resources to help the next generation rise to new heights. For that next generation, she advises, "Be passionate, be determined, and never take 'no' for an answer. People can tell you 'no' but that doesn't mean you have to believe that it's going to be 'no.' For me 'no' is the starting of a conversation."

### Honor and Recognition

Mitchell's commitment to raise the bar as a steward of the future has brought her many well-deserved accolades.

By presidential appointment, she served on the White House Conference on Small Business and SBA Regional Regulatory Fairness Board. Just a few of her other honors include the California Entrepreneurial Spirit Award, Outstanding Black Entrepreneur from the Black Business Association, Woman Business Entrepreneur of the Year from the Los Angeles Mayor's Office, Award of Merit for Outstanding Black Entrepreneurs from the County of Los Angeles, the Economic Development Award from the Black Business Association, and the Business Leadership Award from the Magic Johnson Foundation.

Now she adds NAWBO-LA Hall of Fame inductee to that list. She's extremely proud of this acknowledgment from an organization that allowed her to network with successful women

and rise in her career.

"NAWBO-LA was one of the first organizations I joined as an entrepreneur," she said. "They were there to support me, and to be recognized by leaders in an organization as influential politically and economically as NAWBO-LA is amazing."

**About Computer Consulting Operations Specialists, Inc.:** CC-OPS was launched at the start of the information technology (IT) revolution in 1985. Since its inception, CC-OPS revenues and earnings have grown consistently and robustly. Today, CC-OPS continues to provide Enterprise IT solutions, including desktop support services, voice/video/data integration, internetworking, helpdesk, and security solutions. For more information: <http://www.ccops.com>.

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | [info@nawbola.org](mailto:info@nawbola.org)

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.

## Press Room

- Online Newsletters
- Press Releases
- NAWBO-LA in the News
- e-Bulletin (members only)



## NAWBO-LA ONLINE NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

### Hall of Fame Inductee

*Each year, NAWBO-LA inducts into our Hall of Fame women who represent the quintessential entrepreneur who strives for excellence in everything that she does and has given back extensively to her community*



**Valerie Red-Horse**  
President/Founder, Red-Horse Native Productions

*"Be strong in who you are. You can have it all. Having the confidence to be who you want to be is really the best advice I can give any young person."*

When Valerie Red-Horse, an acclaimed actress and filmmaker, didn't see films and TV shows that accurately portrayed Native Americans, she started a production company and made her own. When, as an investment professional, she didn't feel Native American tribes were getting the financial advice and services they required, she launched a securities firm and brought the concept of a tribal financial specialty to Western International Securities. Today, when she sees an unfulfilled need, she continues to look for a way to rise to the occasion and meet it.

Though she didn't begin her career thinking she wanted to own multiple businesses, her drive and ambition – and desire to give back to the Native American community – led her to take risks and follow a path that few before her had traveled. The results speak to her entrepreneurial talent and her ongoing commitment to create a positive future for not only herself, but for those who will follow in her footsteps.

"It's really important to go beyond just your business plan," she said. "A big part is giving back. You're reaching out to the next generation and you're reaching out to people in need."

For example, on one of her financial jobs, she worked with a reservation in Minnesota that lacked many basic services, so she coordinated with her church to bring in a medical team to provide assistance, and also helped with building houses.

"It's so rewarding," she added. "It enriches your life and builds your network" – a network that in turn can help increase business in the future – and a network that, she noted, organizations like NAWBO-LA serve as crucial in developing and expanding to provide women business owners with the strongest support system possible. She's "extremely honored" and "just so grateful" to NAWBO-LA for selection to its Hall of Fame in 2008.

### Stories From Within

Red-Horse's business ventures have created outstanding accomplishments. On the film and television side, her 1995 screenplay *Lozen*, the true story of an Apache woman warrior, was selected and workshopped at the Sundance Writers Lab. For her production company's first project, she wrote, produced, starred in and distributed *Naturally Native*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and secured a U.S. release. She also produced and directed *True Whispers*, an award-winning TV documentary about the Navajo Code Talkers. Red-Horse currently is producing and directing a film for the Choctaw Nation about its involvement in World War I while working on several other film projects.

Before she launched Red-Horse Native Productions, Red-Horse felt most films about Native Americans told stories from others' perspectives. Now, the stories come from within. Looking to pass on this important approach to future film industry professionals, she founded the Hollywood Access Program for Natives (H.A.P.N.), a nonprofit educational and training organization for Native youth. With a couple of other Native American production companies now in business, she said, "hopefully we started a trend."

### Financial Literacy

In her finance work, Red-Horse also looks to serve the needs of the Native American community. She entered the field in the 1970s, while she was working on launching her entertainment career, and loved it. As the Indian gaming industry grew, she saw a gap in tribes' abilities to control their assets and empower themselves financially.

Once again, she rose to the occasion, forming a securities firm and later becoming head of the Tribal Finance/Tribal Asset Management Division of Western International Securities, plus as president of her own financial services holding company.

Red-Horse works with tribal nations throughout North America to provide financing and economic development solutions, specializing in gaming, infrastructure and more. She has assisted tribes in financings ranging from \$1 million to \$500 million.

Her work fills a need that she feels other large financial institutions don't – and that means addressing educational and cultural issues. She explained, "We're very focused on financial literacy to ensure a long-term financial plan as opposed to just a Wall Street transaction."

### Family Values

For all of her professional accomplishments, Red-Horse takes the most pride in her ability to maintain a healthy personal and professional balance – she's been married 26 years to former professional football player Curt Mohl, and they have three children, ages 22, 18 and

9.

"I've really held fast to my family values and made that a priority," she said. "I'm proud and grateful to God and my family that I've been able to maintain that through having so many careers. I certainly don't take all the credit – living with an ambitious entrepreneur can be tough!"

As for her kids and others who will lead the way in the future, particularly women, she said they don't have to adhere to the same stereotypes that told women of her generation they couldn't be the movers and shakers of the world. Her advice to them? "Be strong in who you are. You can have it all. Having the confidence to be who you want to be is really the best advice I can give any young person."

**About Red-Horse Financial Group and Red-Horse Native Productions:** Through her financial work at Western International Securities (Red-Horse Financial Group serves as a holding company), Valerie Red-Horse has been involved in more than 50 tribal financings totaling more than \$2 billion. Red-Horse Native Productions currently has four projects in various stages of development. For more information: [www.valerieredhorse.com](http://www.valerieredhorse.com).

>> [BACK](#)

[HOME](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

900 Wilshire Boulevard | Suite 404 | Los Angeles, CA | 90017 | ph 213.622.3200 | fx 213.622.6659 | [info@nawbola.org](mailto:info@nawbola.org)

© 2008 NAWBO-LA All Rights Reserved.

Site design by Zeesman Communication, Inc.