

Second Annual HER Awards Luncheon held to honor eight excellent role models

by Christine Bradley

The Granduca Hotel was the scene of Houston Woman Magazine's Second Annual Nominate HER Awards Luncheon where eight amazing women were honored for being excellent role models. All were nominated in eight different categories by readers of Houston Woman Magazine and selected by members of its staff.

Those honored and the awards they received include Chris Hook, Broad Shoulders Award; Lisa Wang, Community Service Award; Nicolette Hardwicke, Evolving Eve Award; Suzan Deison, Gutsy Gal Award; Tracy Case, Maximum Mom Award; Mimi Dinh, Savvy Sister Award; Saakshi Chowdhary, Tomorrow's Woman Award and Nancy Rutledge, Wise Woman Award.

"We owe so much to the generous sponsors of the Second Annual Nominate HER Awards program," commented Beverly Denver, publisher of Houston Woman Magazine. "Because of their generous support of the goals of this program, we are able to celebrate the lives of eight amazing women — the kind of women we are in awe of and inspired by."

This year's Nominate HER Award sponsors are Chilton Capital Management, Margo P. Geddie of Smith Barney, the Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce, Frankie Ann Holmes, M.D., Marnoble Computer Sales and Service, Unity Church of North Houston and the Vickie Milazzo Institute.

The award winners, those who nominated them, sponsors and their guests attended the small private event. And, as last year, the gala celebration turned out to be an emotionally charged event — for the award recipients, as well as those there to hear their incredible stories of "overcoming challenges, doing for others and succeeding in ways that inspire others to live their best lives each and every day!"

September/October 2008
Houston Woman magazine



Chris Hook presented Broad Shoulders Award

by Beverly Denver

Chris Hook, a two-time breast cancer survivor who has utilized her breast cancer journey to help and inspire breast cancer survivors and their families is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2008 Broad Shoulders Award.

Hook is one of the founders of the Care, Share and Be Aware Breast Cancer Support Center at Northwest Medical Center. And, according to Esther Valdez who nominated Hook for this award, "her positive attitude and loving smile has been the source of strength for many walking the same journey."

Valdez said, "One of the many reasons for nominating Chris for the Broad Shoulders Award is the special gift she has given her best friend, Denise Veillon, who lost her battle with breast cancer five years ago. Denise and Chris shared the breast cancer journey and, along with finding friendship and understanding together, they shared a love for family and life. I witnessed their camaraderie firsthand, and it was truly magical."

After Veillon passed away, Hook wanted to do something to keep the memory or spirit of her friend alive. With the help of two other breast cancer survivors, Hook proposed a library be started at The Breast Center — the Denise Veillon Memorial Library. Today that library is a reality. It has been used by many, providing help to other survivors, family members and staff, giving them access to information about breast cancer, nutrition and chemotherapy.

Valdez added, "Chris has taken on the responsibility of accepting donations, buying new books and, most importantly, writing personal letters of gratitude to those making donations. She also writes letters to the survivor or person whose life is celebrated by a donated book in the library. She does all this as a volunteer!"

Additionally, Hook and her husband continue to visit Denise Veillon's family. Hook befriended Denise' daughter and spends many hours with her, picking her up from school and sharing.

Hook has also served as a volunteer for the M.D. Anderson Children Art Project — Adopt A Store and has served as an American Cancer Society Reach to Recovery volunteer and trainer.

"Chris has assisted many breast cancer survivors through difficult times and helped them deal with their anxiety and vulnerability. She continues to be an active and important part of the Care, Share and Be Aware Breast Cancer Support Group and is always willing to share her journey to make sure other survivors know that there is hope. Chris is truly deserving of this award," concluded Valdez.



Lisa Wang named 2008 Community Angel

by Kim James

One pair of best friends combined their passion for turning cast off goods into fab finds with a desire to help families and animals and created a resale shop that uses both donations and proceeds for a greater good.

Lisa Wang is the recipient of the Community Angel award for providing hope and assistance in our community, leaving a positive mark on others and serving as an excellent role model in our community.

Wang was nominated by Rev. Shay St. John, minister at Unity Church of North Houston.

Rev. St. John says, “Lisa inspires others to ‘own’ their unique part of her dream.”

Helping Hearts Resale Heaven is a resale shop located on the grounds of Unity Church of North Houston. Items are donated by people and organizations all over Houston. Volunteers sift through the items and display those that can be used by young mothers, struggling families and other individuals in need.

“We have never had to solicit donations,” Wang says. “They just come our way.”

Nothing goes to waste here – surplus items are donated to Aldine Assistance Ministries and other groups who take needed clothes and supplies to Mexico.

Before Helping Hearts Resale Heaven was a reality, Wang and co-founder Natalie Thompson would spend weekends running a traveling garage sale. Wang says the two would find ways to recycle items people donated so that someone else would benefit from it.

Wang remembers, “We talked about winning the lottery and becoming professional dumpster divers for 10 years.”

They didn’t hit the jackpot, but did find a space to make their traveling exhibition a more permanent fixture when Unity Church moved to a larger location. In its three years of operation, the shop has moved into its own building on the church grounds and is open three days a week.

Financial proceeds from sales are given to different charities, but always organizations that are making a positive impact on society. Wang says she and Thompson choose which charities to donate to; Thompson leans toward family charities while Wang leans toward animal charities. Both particularly like to donate to small grassroots organization because a \$500 gift is such a great help to a struggling organization.

A large focus of the resale shop is meeting immediate need. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit, Helping Hearts opened their facility so that those who were in need could take whatever they could use. A small non-profit in Michigan sent blankets and financial gifts so that Helping Hearts could assist those who had been displaced and others in need.

Wang insists that Helping Hearts wouldn't be the same without its volunteers.

“They have taken ownership of this mission, and we could not do without them,” Wang says.

In addition to being the co-founder of Helping Hearts, Wang is a print program manager for the notebook department at Hewlett Packard. She has been with Hewlett Packard/Compaq for 19 years.

“The resale shop is a manifestation of my desire to help animals, and that brings me a lot of joy,” Wang says.

Though the seed of a desire to help animals has blossomed into the resale shop, Wang realizes there is still work to be done.

“This award means that my best friend and I have turned our vision into a reality,” Wang says. “That’s a great feeling, but there is much work to do, and I look forward to this vision unfolding to do even greater good.”



Nicolette Hardwicke named Evolving Eve for 2008

by Kim James

In the midst of trying circumstances, Nicolette Hardwicke held onto her vision of transforming early childhood education and opening the Paddington British Private School.

Hardwicke is the recipient of the Evolving Eve award for accomplishing a significant, positive change in her life, improving not only her status in life but also the lives of

those around her.

She was nominated by Laura Phillips who says Hardwicke is a, “quiet, gentle person, yet underneath that exterior is a strong, courageous lady who, despite adversity, never gave up.”

Hardwicke’s dream was to create a “truly unique, child-appealing school” that instilled in children a love of learning.

“I came 5,000 miles across the world alone with 2 babies to a country I knew little about and opened my school with a dream, a vision and a lot of courage,” Hardwicke says.

The adversity Phillips mentions arrived not long after Hardwicke arrived in America.

Hardwicke was robbed of all she owned, but that didn’t stop her from opening her school. For transportation, she purchased a bicycle and attached a children’s trailer to it. She purchased all the equipment needed for the school on credit cards.

Her school would be unique because of its attention to fine arts as well as academics. Hardwicke believes, “the more a child is exposed to music and the beauty of the world around them, the more the brain is stimulated.”

Hardwicke comes from a fine arts upbringing. She grew up listening to classical music and opera, and her mother was an opera singer. At age 16, Hardwicke became a professional dancer. She received her certificate in ballet from the Royal Academy of Dancing and later graduated from the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. She was a ballerina and modern dancer for many years. Her last public performance was for Prince Charles.

Once she had a family of her own, Hardwicke turned her focus to children. She studied early childhood education, the Montessori technique and child psychology.

“When my career as a dancer ended, dance was left behind, but not entirely,” she says. “It was then that I came up with the idea to include that along with all aspects of fine arts into my program.”

The Paddington British Private School's program includes exposure to classical music throughout the day, ballet, dance and movement, as well as an advanced academic syllabus, computer lab with educational games, introduction to French and Spanish and a child-friendly science lab.

Paddington students are on track to be reading by age four. They are introduced to the orchestra, the instruments and their sounds, and are taken to Jones Hall every year to hear the symphony. In visual arts classes, children learn to recognize the works of Monet, Van Gogh, Matisse, O'Keeffe and others.

The Paddington British Private School opened 20 years ago in a church portable building with a handful of children. Today, the school is considered the leading preschool in The Woodlands. Enrollment is around 350 students. The 40 staff members are from all around the world.

Hardwicke says to go from a small building to where the school is today, educating thousands of children must be her greatest achievement. She credits her success to God and says he has made her the person she is today.

"If you believe in God, all dreams are possible and can come true," Hardwicke says. "His intangible, invisible presence was the motivating force behind all of my creativity. He was the wind beneath my wings and the voice that gave me the courage to keep going."

Hardwicke says that being recognized for her years of hard work and dedication to children is extremely rewarding.

"It's an acknowledgement, a tribute, to anyone who sets their mind on certain goals, that through determination, conviction and perseverance, all goals can be realized."



2008 Gusty Gal Award goes to Suzan Deison

by Beverly Denver

Suzan Deison, founder and president of the newly organized Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce is the recipient of the 2008 Gutsy Gal Award. She was nominated for this honor by her husband, attorney Joe Colangelo, and selected among other nominees by the staff of Houston Woman Magazine.

On the nomination form, Colangelo wrote, "How many people would have the guts to start a new chamber of commerce? Suzan did, while handling more challenges in life than most of us have in a lifetime, and she did it with grace and humility and with a caring heart."

Deison has served as president of both the North Houston Greenspoint Chamber of Commerce and the Galleria Chamber of Commerce.

"I saw firsthand the commitment and passion she has for her community. She saw no barriers. She asked everyone and anyone to get involved, and to my knowledge, never took 'no' for an answer," said Colangelo. "A 'no' might be a temporary setback but, ultimately, she would get the sponsor or new member to join."

Colangelo continues, "When we met 11 years ago, Suzan was a single mom. Her daughter, Taylor, has cerebral palsy and cannot talk and has mental retardation. But, Suzan never complains. She faced cancer twice and won. She previously had melanoma, and five years ago she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Suzan took her radiation treatments after work when she served as president of the Galleria Chamber of Commerce, showing her commitment to her job, and I never heard her complain." Deison has two other children, Melanie and Grant, and seven grandchildren. She has one granddaughter with Wolf-Hirschhorn Syndrome and another with Down Syndrome. Colangelo commented, "I have never hear her say, Why my family?"

When Melanie was part of the evacuation from Louisiana due to Hurricane Katrina, Deison took in not only her daughter and her family (including four granddaughters) but also one of Melanie's friends and her family (including the friend's three children) because they had nowhere to go. Deison later helped her daughter and son-in-law and the friend's family find housing and open a restaurant in Conroe.

Earlier this year, Deison founded the Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce, showing once again her talent for and commitment to making things happen.

She started by recruiting a dedicated group of professionals (representing both small and big business) to serve as on the chamber's first board of directors.

The group's first luncheon, held in March, was a huge success. It featured former First Lady Barbara Bush as its keynote speaker and was attended by more than 300.

Since then the chamber has continued to flourish with a growing membership and an impressive program of work.



Cancer Survivor Tracy Case Named 2008 Maximum Mom

by Kim James

Tracy Case has not let cancer stop her from being the best mother she can be to her two young children.

Case is the recipient of the Maximum Mom Award for being an extraordinary mother of high integrity, strong moral character and, in all ways, serving as a role model for her children.

Nicole Dixon, director of communications for CanCare, nominated Case.

Dixon says, “Tracy makes you want to be as strong as she is when you are around her, and she doesn’t even realize it.”

At the age of 30, Case was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy. Her son was 10 months old. Just three years later, she was diagnosed with Stage IV metastasis breast disease to her spine and liver. This was only four weeks after the birth of her daughter.

Both diagnoses brought fear — fear that she would leave her children without a mother. That fear fueled her fight. With a strong network of family, church members and neighbors supporting her, Case took on a “kick butt” attitude and balanced motherhood while battling cancer. She says a positive attitude, a sense of humor, faith, networking; support groups and hope are the keys to her survival.

“My faith really helps me get through this, because I know I have to trust the Lord to watch over my children,” she says.

Case says she took her example from her own mother.

“She taught me how to be a strong woman and mom,” she says.

Case’s mother is a three-time cancer survivor. When Case was a young girl, her mother was diagnosed with melanoma. When Case was 18, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

“I do not remember ever feeling like I grew up with cancer in my life, because my mom made sure that our lives did not revolve around cancer,” she says. “I think that is the example I strive to live for my children. I pray I can do as good of a job of protecting, loving and teaching them to be strong individuals like my mom did.”

Case’s son will turn eight, and her daughter, five, this month.

She says her favorite thing about being their mom is the unsolicited hugs and “I love yous” they give.

“That makes all the tough times worth every minute of it,” Case says. In addition to being a dedicated mother to her children, Case speaks hope and encouragement into the lives of others who are fighting cancer.

In 2006, Case became a CanCare volunteer. She went through 17 hours of volunteer training in order to provide support to young women facing cancer. Case says she can pay it forward by helping others in cancer situations similar to her own.

She often is a speaker for CanCare and helps to raise awareness for the organization. Case says when she speaks with her referrals and with the public, she keeps it real and doesn’t sugarcoat anything. She admits that battling cancer is not easy and there are tough times, but she also shares that there is hope at the end of the tunnel.

Case continues to strive for the future and challenge herself. In 2006, she ran the Houston Half Marathon.

“I am not a runner by any stretch of the imagination,” she says. “It was something I could do to show this disease it would not rule my life and make all the decisions.”

Case still won’t let cancer or fear of its recurrence rule her life. She is daily devoted to her family. She says her current greatest accomplishment is, “surviving being a mother to two very bright, strong-willed children.”

“Being a mom with a chronic illness is hard, and balancing it all sometimes seems daunting,” she says. “But I am motivated to continue doing what I am doing.”



Mimi Dinh honored with 2008 Savvy Sister Award

by Kim James

Early in her career, Mimi Dinh was determined to break through the glass ceiling into a career where she could use her knowledge and skills to fill a growing need in the marketing industry.

Dinh is the recipient of the Savvy Sister award for making an innovative change to her workplace.

She was nominated by Deborah Nguyen. Nguyen says, “Mimi Dinh has always been the kind of person that thinks outside the box, personally and professionally.”

Dinh’s career includes a stint as a marketing director for a telecommunications company as well as a promotions manager and a public relations director for two top agencies in Houston. Even though in the upper ranks, she sought a career where she could use the skills in all areas of her expertise, choose projects she truly believed in and express her own creative vision.

These factors, combined with a desire for a flexible schedule so she could spend time with her daughter caused her to set out on her own. Mikel Marketing opened its doors for business in 1999.

Mikel Marketing serves clients who place a high value on image and aesthetics. Dinh has defined a target market that reflects and expects her company’s style. She prefers working with a small group of clients who share her taste rather than trying to satisfy everyone.

“Style isn’t abstract,” Dinh says. “It’s a direct manifestation of your attitude and image. I am proud of our style, which is modern and a bit on the cutting edge, and through it, I try to show an honest expression of the values and substance of my company.”

This approach comes from Dinh’s personal philosophy of incorporating excellence into everything she does. The company prides itself on providing excellent services to its clients.

Much of her early work went into creating Mikel’s corporate identity package, including the company’s logo, letterhead, website and press kit.

“I wanted our corporate ID to project the right image and show people how professional, creative, experienced, and innovative we were,” she says.

Within a few months of completing the package and promoting Mikel’s services, she had a list of clients who filled the niche she was trying to establish for her company.

“We started with a bang and really set the tone for the reputation of my company,” she says.

Dinh designed the five-paneled press kit herself to reflect a clean, modern feel. Clients can log on to the flash animated website and learn everything they need to know about Mikel Marketing. Dinh stays in touch with her clients each month through an electronic newsletter that includes information about Mikel’s events as well as recommendations of professional and personal development seminars and workshops.

Dinh’s success hasn’t come without its share of challenges. Six months after Mikel Marketing was in business, Dinh’s husband announced he had accepted a fellowship in Gyn-Oncology at Massachusetts General Hospital and the family was moving.

Dinh didn’t want to close down the business, so she found a way to run the business from Boston. She had a space in Houston where she continued to see clients once a month. Two assistants, and a host of other contract workers, were key in helping her business stay operable.

Operating from a remote location did not affect Mikel Marketing’s productivity. She has been back in Houston (full-time) for three years, and the business continues to grow and exceed the expectations of clients.

Dinh says through this, she has learned to be an effective leader by trusting her staff, showing them the respect they deserve and being flexible, giving and receiving input from others.

She is proud of this leadership award and wants “to continue to strive for excellence, inspire and help others through my work, my personal friendships and my volunteerism and community involvement.”



Tomorrow's Woman Award presented to Saakshi Chowdhary for volunteer efforts in India

by Christine Bradley

Saakshi Chowdhary, a Girl Scout and junior at Seven Lakes High School, is the recipient of the 2008 Tomorrow's Woman Award. Lady Oliver of the San Jacinto Council of Girl Scouts nominated her for this honor.

“Saakshi is a young woman making a difference in the lives of others,” she Oliver. She is the recipient of Girl Scout's Gold Award. Like the Eagle Scout Award in Boy Scouts, the Gold Award is the highest and most difficult award a Girl Scout can achieve. Saakshi is a truly remarkable young lady and very deserving of the Tomorrow's Woman Award. She cares about other people and shows it. She definitely is a role model for other young women.”

Chowdhary identified a need in India, the country of her ancestors, and decided to do some to help the situation.

While visiting family in Breilly, India, Chowdhary took a tour of the Arya Samaja Orphanage. There, she became aware the lack of attention to dental hygiene among the residents. The situation got her to thinking about what she could do to improve the situation and make a difference in the lives of the orphaned girls she met there.

With the approval of the orphanage, she made plans to hold a Dental Health Care Camp for 30 of the teenage residents. She recruited volunteers from the local dental college in Breilly to speak to the girls about good hygiene and a local dentist to give each girl an examination.

Chowdhary also spoke to her own dentist back here at Katy Orthodontics about her desire to help the girls in India. Dr. Dhutia got excited about the idea of the Dental Health Care Camp and agreed to donate a dental hygiene kit for each of the girls in India.

When asked why she chose to hold a Dental Health Care Camp for orphaned girls in India, Chowdhary replied, “I want to see positive changes in the world. It is my belief that by instilling these orphans with a positive image of themselves, they will acquire healthier habits. And, hopefully, that positive step would help them develop a more positive image of themselves. And, in the end result in more positive futures.”

Chowdhary was not able to attend the Nominate HER Awards Luncheon. At the time she was back in India, visiting family and, no doubt, looking for other ways to help the local residents. Jay Chowdhary attended the luncheon and was all smiles as he listened to the wonderful things said about his daughter and as he accepted the award on her behalf.



Nancy Rutledge named Wise Woman 2008
Winner has been exemplary leader of Houston CPA Society for 30 years

by Beverly Denver

Nancy Rutledge, executive director of the Houston CPA Society, is the recipient of the 2008 Wise Woman Award. She was nominated by Paula Ruth of Paula Ruth & Company. Ruth has known the honoree since 1994.

When Rutledge joined the Houston CPA Society, the organization had about 3,000 members and a projected deficit budget. Today, the Society boasts more than 8,000 members and a yearly budget in excess of \$1 million — thanks in large part to the leadership and wise counsel of Rutledge.

Rutledge was instrumental in helping the Houston CPA Society grow from a social group to a leading professional development organization and advocate for the accounting profession.

It is rare in the association profession — where volunteer leadership changes every year — for the executive director to survive three or four years, let alone 30.

“The key [to success] is being flexible, but also being a Wise Woman,” said Ruth. She continued, “Throughout Nancy’s tenure with the Houston CPA Society, she has been a mentor to its leaders...In the early years, the Society’s leadership was largely male.”

However, Rutledge has also mentored three females to reach Society presidency and a fourth is now president-elect. One CPA she has mentored now heads the Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council.”

Ruth also notes that Rutledge “allows each committee chair or chapter officer an abundance of leeway, but she is careful to represent the Society’s best interests. She has been an exemplary model of ethics and professionalism.”

In 1997, Rutledge battled invasive breast cancer and missed only five weeks of work. “Seeing how she handled not only this disease, but also more recent professional, personal and health-related issues, has been inspirational to me and to Society members,” said Ruth.

“Nancy has mentored me in working with volunteers,” said Ruth. “She is the most organized person I have ever known. She has taught me the importance of incorporating exercise into every day and having fun while you do the work. She has been among the first to adopt new technologies, whether it was a fax, personal computer, digital camera, cell phone, email or Blackberry.”

Rutledge has also mentored many others in her field. She has served as president of the Houston Society of Association Executives in 1980 and on the board of directors of the

Texas Society of Association Executives and the TSAE Foundation. Rutledge is also a long-time member of the American Society of Association Executives and remains involved giving advice to current HSAE leaders, even when she cannot personally attend meetings.

“In the association business where staff leadership is often at the whim of the volunteer members who change each year, Nancy is truly a legend. That wouldn’t be true if she were not such a wise woman,” said Ruth.

The Houston CPA Society apparently agrees with Ruth; it has selected Nancy Rutledge as the honoree of the 2009 Scholarship Extravaganza.