



Evolving Eve Award presented to Jacqueline Baly Chaumette

by Nikki Rosenberg

On June 25, in the afternoon of her 15th wedding anniversary, Jacqueline Baly Chaumette received the Evolving Eve Award from Houston Woman Magazine. Her friend, Karyn Dean, nominated Chaumette for this award; it honors a woman who has accomplished a significant, positive change in her life, improving not only her status in life but also the lives of those around her.

Dean said, “At the time I met Jacquie, I knew immediately this was a young woman with lots of energy, lots of drive, lots of ambition, very family-oriented, very much about giving back to the community; and I knew that good things were going to happen to her.”

Good things have happened for Chaumette in the past decade. In 1999, Chaumette formed BalyProjects, LLC and still serves as its president and CEO. In this capacity, she works with elected officials, independent school districts and corporations to develop public education programs. She has been featured on television and radio to discuss policy matters regarding transportation, air quality, water and education. In addition, she lectures on public policy at the University of Houston as an adjunct professor.

In May 2008, Chaumette won election to Sugar Land’s City Council with over 69 percent of the vote, the widest margin in the city’s 50-year history.

Throughout her career, Chaumette has been a pioneer. As the Director of Planning and Community Development for the cities of Seabrook and Sugar Land, Chaumette was the youngest department head and first person of color in the cities’ histories. She was the youngest person in 75 years to be named Commissioner of the Brazos River Authority, a statewide appointment. As Vice President of the Transportation/Infrastructure and Environmental Division for the Greater Houston Partnership, Chaumette was, again, the youngest and only person of color to hold an executive position in the organization’s history.

A fitting tribute to these accomplishments, Chaumette was recently nominated for the 2009 Outstanding Young American Jaycees Award by U.S. Congressman Pete Olson and former State Senator Kyle Janek. Past recipients include Elvis Presley, Neil Armstrong and Bill Clinton.

Among her many awards, Chaumette was honored as Alumnus of the Year from the University of Houston earlier this year. Her other awards include Dynamic Woman of Houston, one of the 50 Most Influential Women of Houston in 2008, Woman on the Move, Entrepreneur of the Year, Outstanding Minority Public Official (COMPTA) and Civil Servant of the Year.

However, the awards and achievements in her career were hard won. Chaumette's parents moved here from St. Martin/Maarten in 1963. They attempted to gain American citizenship by working as indentured servants for three years on the island of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Five years later, Chaumette was born on the island, as an American citizen. In 1976, her father moved to Baytown and shared a trailer with 12 other immigrants while saving enough money to buy a house and move his family to Texas. Two months later, Chaumette moved into the house her father purchased in a small neighborhood just north of Channelview.

Of her parents' sacrifices, Chaumette said, "My family gave up everything and left their entire family to come to this country to provide a better life and education for me."

After enduring ridicule and torment from the local children because of her Caribbean accent and customs, Chaumette decided education and acclimation were her means to success. In addition to academic achievement, Chaumette won acclaim as a flautist with an instrument purchased at a pawn shop. After graduating magna cum laude from high school, Chaumette was awarded a music and academic scholarship at the University of Houston and became the first in her family to attend college.

An internship at the Harris County Community Development Department her senior year ultimately led to a Master's degree in City Planning, specializing in Public Policy.

Chaumette said, "Local government gives me an opportunity to serve the public while utilizing my educational and professional background in transportation/infrastructure and land use planning."

Chaumette also serves and effects change by sitting on several boards, including Sugar Land's 4-B Economic Development Corporation, Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce, Texas CASA, Chinquapin School and Girls Inc. She is also a member of the Center for Houston's Future, 2005 Business-Civic Leadership Forum; Leadership Houston, Texas Executive Women, Exchange Club, Rotary International and the Junior League of Houston.

Chaumette is also a dedicated wife and mother. Since 1994, Chaumette has lived in Fort Bend County with her husband, attorney David Chaumette, and their sons, Raphael and Alexandre. Her love, pride and appreciation for her family are huge and apparent.