

## Savvy Sister Award goes to Dianah Dulany

by Nikki Rosenberg

Dianah Dulany, owner of ComedySportz Houston, was presented the 2010 Savvy Sister Award from Houston Woman Magazine on May 21 at a luncheon at La Colombe d'Or Mansion. The event honored seven women, all deemed excellent role models, in the publication's Fourth Annual Nominate Her Awards program. Friend and co-worker Claire O'Malley nominated Dulany for the award.

O'Malley said, "Dianah is an all-around savvy woman. She's got great business skills; she communicates well. She's humorous, and she just brings fun to life."

From the time she was a little girl in Central Texas, Dulany dreamed of performing musical comedy professionally. She realized her vision when she opened ComedySportz in Houston almost 20 years ago.

Dulany said, "ComedySportz consistently produces quality entertainment that is appropriate for all ages. A show can genuinely entertain a 14-year-old's birthday party, a bachelorette party and a church group of singles all at the same time! Seeing or being part of a performance always makes my day."

Before Dulany found her dream career, she paid her dues. She studied theater and acting at Southwestern University in Georgetown, TX. She continued her education at Lindenwood College in St. Charles, MO, where she received her MFA in Theater Management.

Dulany moved to Milwaukee to take part in a summer stock company. She remained there to accept a position to manage Theater Tesseract. Though Dulany worked 60 hours a week at the non-profit theater company, she found time to sign up for improvisational classes at Comedy-Sportz. When she completed the classes, she was invited to join the troupe. Four years later, Dulany got the chance to transition from troupe member to club owner.

Dulany said, "I performed with them for four years and was then offered the opportunity to open my own club. I didn't really want to leave Milwaukee, I loved it there, but since I had this opportunity, I returned to Texas."

By that time, Dulany had become friends with the Comedy Sportz founder. He assisted Dulany with a small loan to help her open the business. When she was ready to start auditioning actors, he flew to Houston to help her choose her original troupe.

Dulany found local talent in the theatre department at the universities, as well as by placing ads in newspapers. While holding auditions, casting and training her original

ensemble, she began scouting for performance venues. In November 1990, ComedySportz performed its first show at the River Cafe on Montrose Blvd.

As Dulany explained, “People are often convinced that our show will be dirty or “blue,” and that if they sit too close, they will be picked on.”

In the beginning, the business struggled financially. So much so, Dulany considered closing the doors to ComedySportz. It was then she learned one of her greatest lessons in business.

Dulany said, “When times were tough, the troupe rallied, and I learned I could rely on it, no matter what. Through financial issues, personality conflicts and other business challenges, I’ve learned honesty and openness in every situation is the way to go. I also try to apply the improvisational tool of ‘yes, and’ to my life – saying yes to everything possible. It can really make a positive difference!”

With the support of her troupe, Dulany’s business grew. In addition to the public performances, she began booking private events — everything from birthday parties to corporate training seminars. She began teaching classes to adults and children, adding special programs in the summer. When the business found a permanent home on Town and Country Blvd., she rented the space for special events.

Dulany now employs over 40 people, who still act as her support system.

“I work with the greatest group of people in the world,” Dulany said. “This troupe respects each other, both on the stage and off. We are truly an ensemble, with everyone making a difference.”

By combining her love of improvisational comedy and business acumen, Dulany was able to introduce Houstonians to a new form of comedy theater. Her courage to persevere through times of adversity has led to laughter and fun for multiple generations.

Nikki Rosenberg is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.