

# Women in Business

by Penny Randell

This year the Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce celebrates 50 years of service in our mountain community. Among their many special events, they sponsor, coordinate and produce the Women in Business luncheon each and every year. In fact, 2020 means the seventh annual Women in Business luncheon, which provides an exquisite meal, an uplifting guest speaker and a rousing opportunity to network with women from the community.

The guest speaker this past year, Dr. Keren Startz, is a renowned expert in cancer/hematology and oncology at Lutheran Hospital. Her speech covered advances in cancer treatment, highlighting what she calls “toxicity in cancer care,” or the financial burden it incurs. The good news is: advances in treating cancer victims is making big news. Between 1991 and 2015 the death rate fell dramatically. Therapeutic advances are attributed to precision care based on genetic understanding. What is known as genetic profiling is now the prescribed treatment and greatly responsible for the decrease in deaths.

As it turns out, attendance at the Women in Business luncheon is blossoming and each year the size of the event has increased into what it is today. Chamber President and CEO Betsy Hays said, “The number of women successfully conducting business in our area is growing by leaps and bounds and we at the Chamber strive to do what we can to fuel and encourage that growth.”

The event, which is held at Mt. Vernon Canyon Club, is sponsored by an abundance of businesses throughout the area. Centerpieces for each table were furnished by these businesses and were given away to attendees during the course of the event. Most importantly, nominees for induction into the Mountain Area Women in Business Hall of Fame are recognized, and the year’s three winners are revealed.

This past year, six nominees were announced: Rita Felde, Rebecca Kirschner, Kay D’Evelyn La Montagne, Megan Mitchell, Vicki Pender, and Gail Sharp. The Chamber committee voted Rita Felde of Felde CPA Group; Kay D’Evelyn La Montagne of Evergreen Design Center; and Gail Sharp of Tallgrass Aveda Spa and Salon into the Hall of Fame.

A special thank you goes to our title sponsors, Dr. Keren Startz and Lutheran Medical Center | SCL Health.

Hall of Fame Inductees:

Rita Felde:

Inductee Rita Felde sold Felde CPA Group in 2017, with a three-year exit plan to aid in the transition. She says, “I am proud to have built a successful CPA practice that has gained the confidence of my clients and employees.” Living here with her husband since 1981, she has worked within the community since the start.

When Rita states that she has enjoyed all her 30 years of volunteer opportunities, she is merely scratching the surface. Dedication paved the way for this striking individual to sit on the board of

directors for Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce, join Team Evergreen, Blue Spruce Kiwanis, Center for the Arts Evergreen (CAE), and College Invest to name only a few. Currently, this driven woman is working with CAE to create a five-year financial plan to accommodate their growth as they begin to lay plans for their second building.

Felde said, “I am honored to receive this recognition from this community that I have worked in since 1981. This has been a fulfilling professional experience and I have enjoyed my many volunteer opportunities.” When asked about beginning a business, she remains positive and says first you need a plan. If you discover that you are moving in the wrong direction, she says it’s okay to stop and totally start over. Most important she said, “Pay attention to details and delegate. Remember, you will probably be expected to wear many hats. Stay flexible and be fair to everyone, including yourself.”

This lady who brings harmony everywhere she goes believes in just that. When asked she said, “Most of all have fun, be happy, and find joy.” Living what she believes is at Felde’s core and the community remains fortunate to engage such a force for good.

Gail Sharp:

Founder and owner of Tallgrass Aveda Spa and Salon, Gail Sharp says that success to her means sharing her passion for a balanced and caring lifestyle. This persevering woman moved to Evergreen in 1995 when she didn’t know anyone and opened a business in an industry where she had no experience. With a staff of 65, it’s up to Sharp to make sure everyone has an income. But mostly, she is steadfast in her belief that her team remain aware of the value of giving back.

Since moving here, Sharp has served on the board of the Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce, Evergreen Animal Protective League, Sculpture Evergreen, and Mount Evans Home Health and Hospice. In addition, each fall Sharp and her staff organize and execute the Soldier Box Project, sending holiday boxes to soldiers across the world.

When asked to comment on her recent win, Sharp said, “I am deeply honored to receive this special recognition from our wonderful Evergreen Area Chamber of Commerce and the powerful women in our mountain community. It is even more special to me because our Tallgrass team is made up of 98% women serving primarily women. We help each other maintain health and wellness in mind, body and spirit.”

To anyone starting out in business, Sharp suggests that one stay strong, surrounding oneself with great business and personal partners. She also believes one should remain open to other’s ideas and focus on win/win solutions.

Kay D’Evelyn La Montagne:

Before selling it in February of this year, Kay D’Evelyn La Montagne had owned Mountain Home and The Evergreen Design Center for 22 years. Prior to moving to Evergreen in 1984 this powerful lady started two private high schools in California. After relocating, she taught at Evergreen Middle and High School, wrote, and gave seminars for the U.S. West Education Foundation. Her focus has always been on how parents can better support their children in school.

La Montagne has served on non-profit boards such as Rotary, Evergreen's Montessori School, D'Evelyn Education Foundation and her own church board. Closest to her heart is initiation & implementation of the Rotary Outdoor Music Park which is located at the Stagecoach Playground.

When asked, La Montagne said, "I am honored to be inducted into the Mountain Area Women in Business Hall of Fame for several reasons. I have incredible admiration for the women who have already been inducted, so it is humbling to be included. I was struck by the amazing energy, enthusiasm and confidence that was so evident at the women's luncheon last Friday."

Included in her amazing accomplishments, La Montagne says she has been happily married three times. She said, "My first husband Dave D'Evelyn, wrote the charter school bill for Colorado, and D'Evelyn Jr/Sr High School is named after him. My second husband, Ted LaMontagne, passed away in 2009. I still live in Evergreen and have remarried."

Truly, this lady has a heart for Evergreen and says she is eternally grateful to live in a community where folks quietly contribute without a lot of fanfare. La Montagne said, "I love the heart of Evergreen and recognize what a gift it is to live here and be actively involved in the community."

In closing, Betsy Hays and the Evergreen Chamber wishes to thank all the sponsors who volunteered and even spoke at this enticing event. As Hays says, "It just gets better every year because of you!" Make arrangements and mark your calendar for next year. The event will be held September 11, 2020 and the chamber hopes to see you there.