

# SOUL PROPRIETOR

National Association of Women Business Owners honors five Orange County women for their business and societal contributions.

By Jan Norman, The Register ■ Photographs by Paul E. Rodriguez

Almost half the privately owned businesses in the United States, 10.6 million, are at least 50-percent-owned by women, according to the Center for Women's Business Research in Washington, D.C. The center's studies indicate these women exhibit different management styles than their male counterparts in business.

Women business owners tend to emphasize intuition and creativity while men stress logic in their decision making, for example. And women are more likely than men to seek advice before making decisions. The style difference is apparent in this year's five recipients of Remarkable Women honors from the Orange County chapter of the National Association of

Women Business Owners. The five women will be the focus of a luncheon expected to draw 700 people at 11 a.m. Friday at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Irvine. Also, 27 community and professional organizations will honor their women of the year at the event. These five headliners discuss their approach to business.



SUSAN VERBURG  
the listener

Verburg was an artist before she bought Merlex Stucco in Orange from her father's estate in 1993. She's the only female executive in charge of the stucco manufacturing industry. "I do everything differently than (men executives). For example, I'm a better listener," Verburg says. "I never told anyone I know anything about this industry. I surround myself with people who have strengths I don't." Verburg believes in teams. "I've been more open to creative criticism than (men are)," she says. "Do I want my feelings protected or do I want the company to grow? It's all about the company." Under her leadership, sales and staff have grown significantly. Merlex has added new products and entered new markets. "I'm seeking advice from others is a strength, not a weakness," she says. "When I was younger, I would get angry when men ignored me. Now I turn it to my advantage."



LINDA HAWKINS  
the empathizer

Hawkins had relocated up and down the East Coast, to England and to Orange County because of her husband's career when she went to work with real estate broker Gloria Winkelmann, who specialized in relocating executives. Twenty-five years later, Hawkins is president of Winkelmann Realty in Fullerton. "I've been through the relocation process so many times, I know they need all the help they can get," she says. A majority of her 32 agents in four offices have also relocated at one time or other. So they all empathize with their clients and understand their needs. "To be successful, you need to treat others as you would want to be treated," Hawkins says. "I try to empower (my agents) the way Gloria empowered me to take on more initiative and more responsibility." A believer in sharing her expertise, Hawkins is president-elect of the Southern California Relocation Council and on the board for California Pacesetters in Relocation.



VALINDA MARTIN  
the inspirer

A Labor Day boating accident in 1993 left Martin a paraplegic. During her two-year recovery, she realized that she surrounded herself with colorful items that gave her inspiration. Perhaps this tendency could be a business, the one-time clothing wholesaler reasoned. In 1998 she opened Art for the Soul on Balboa Island and filled it with handcrafted, whimsical furniture, motivational books and jewelry bearing inspirational messages. In 2003 she opened a second store, in Laguna Beach. "If it's not inspirational, colorful, whimsical, handcrafted or emotional, I won't buy it," Martin says. The store attracts customers and employees who are struggling through difficulties in their lives, she says. "The thing I always tell people is that I have an incredible life. I'm blessed in so many ways. Business is great. I love what I do, and that's not something a whole lot of people can say."



HILARY KAYE  
the mentor

In the 20 years of owning her own Tustin public-relations firm, Kaye has taught and mentored dozens of employees. Many of them have gone on to their own businesses, either in public relations or other fields. "I tend to look at business from the people point of view," she says. "I enjoy the people and the work. I constantly struggle to pull myself back to do the administrative work. "What I don't enjoy is having people here who don't enjoy being here, who are just going through the paces," Kaye adds. So her mentoring continually pushes people to do their best. "When I consider a new initiative or new division, I get everyone's view on it," she says. "I don't have a lot of 'yes' people here. When it comes down to making the decision, I probably lean more toward the intuitive side. If it feels right, I do it. But sometimes logic hits me in the face."



HARRIETT WIEDER  
the connector

After retiring as the first female member of Orange County's Board of Supervisors, Wieder formed her own company, Linkage, to help entrepreneurs make strategic connections with other companies. "It took me a few years to learn that I didn't have to be like 'the boys,'" says Wieder, a resident of Newport Beach. "As women, we think differently, and thinking differently is a big contribution." Men, being naturally competitive, tend to set up win-lose situations, she says. She wants to create collaborative efforts. One such effort, while Wieder was still a supervisor, was the creation of Partnership 2010 to encourage public agencies and business to work together to build Orange County. "I don't think I've ever worked with any public official who saw his role as a partnership with the business community," Wieder says. "That's still my passion."