

# Women's Leadership

BY  
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Rebecca Harris, director of the Center for Women's Entrepreneurship at Chatham University, works on social media strategy for MyBoard with MBA student Huong Tran.



## *The art of growing women-owned businesses*

The Center for Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE) at Chatham University exists to educate, create economic opportunities, and foster entrepreneurial thinking for women in business and Chatham students. As women's leadership is one of Chatham's core mission initiatives, CWE is a perfect fit on campus. Helping women entrepreneurs in all stages of business development to start and grow their companies, CWE utilizes Chatham resources, programs, and expertise.

Founded in 2005, CWE offers specific programs for Chatham undergraduate and graduate students that help to develop the skills needed to succeed in business. Through a mix of programming, it also helps regional businesswomen learn, network, connect, and achieve their business goals.

Rebecca Harris, an award-winning entrepreneur with more than 20 years of experience as a consultant and marketing specialist, has led the Center for Women's Entrepreneurship at Chatham University since 2009. Rebecca's own company – a group of monthly news magazines in the Toledo, Ohio–Ann Arbor, Michigan metro area – achieved the million-dollar revenue mark in just seven years. At CWE, Rebecca develops strategic, innovative programs that are changing the way women do business in southwestern Pennsylvania and empowering women entrepreneurs to take a leading role in driving our region's economy.



Kate Romane, executive chef and owner of the Highland Park restaurant E2, works with her MyBoard mentors to take her business to the next level.

“I am so excited about the progress CWE has made over the past several years,” says Rebecca. “We have been able to really help women entrepreneurs, connect with women who are innovating within larger companies, and create some great programming and networking opportunities for our students.”

MyBoard, CWE’s newest program, is a peer-mentoring program for women businesses owners looking to grow their businesses. A carefully selected board of four mentors provides the business owner with targeted expertise on a wide range of skills that are required to take their businesses to the next level.

“The Chatham CWE MyBoard program grew out of a need for women entrepreneurs to not only succeed in the start up of their business but to sustain it as well,” says MyBoard mentor Beth Slagle, a business attorney with more than 22 years of legal expertise in representing companies of all sizes. “Sustaining and growing are the hard parts, given statistics indicating that while 50 percent of privately held companies in the United States are owned by women, three-fourths of those women-owned businesses are not able to grow beyond \$50,000 in gross revenues. That’s where CWE MyBoard program can make a difference.”

Beth is currently a MyBoard mentor for Kate Romane, executive chef and owner of E2 (pronounced E-squared), a cozy Mediterranean restaurant in Highland Park that features local produce and locally produced goods whenever possible. Kate opened the restaurant in 2010 and it quickly became one of the area’s favorite dining spots.

“The MyBoard program lasts for one year, during which we have five formal meetings, some virtual, and will tackle the issues that will help Kate not only maintain her business, but knock it out of the ballpark,” says Beth.

The board provides essential tools that assist the owner with capacity building and gives the owner the confidence of having a solid support system that provides candid business logic, and gives her the ability to test new ideas in a risk-free environment. “It’s a great program, one that really works for an owner who is intent on growing her business and who will dedicate the time necessary to make it happen,” says Beth.

“Kate has the passion, the incentive, the creativity, and desire,” says Beth. “The MyBoard program brings additional talent and skills to the table that a single business owner, such as Kate, just doesn’t have the time to tackle given the hectic schedule that she endures.

In addition to the launch of MyBoard, CWE offers a number of other programs for a wide spectrum of business women – from those who are developing a concept and starting their businesses to those who are growing their businesses in an effort to reach \$1 million in sales annually. “CWE is also dedicated to working with Chatham University students who are starting businesses, either while they are students or after they graduate. Training women to think and act entrepreneurially whether they own a company or work in a company is one of our primary goals”.

Women have the opportunity to interact, network, and take advantage of mentoring and business development tools through the supportive online community CWE Connect and exclusive events for its members. Anne Flynn Schlicht, assistant director of CWE, coordinates other programming that caters to various stages of business development that CWE offers, including Kauffman FastTrac Listening To Your Business, Kauffman FastTrac NewVenture, and Small Business Basics Workshop. Since CWE began offering Kauffman FastTrac NewVenture and FastTrac Listening to Your Business in 2006, the center estimates it has directly assisted in the start or growth of 110 businesses, says Patricia Decker, program assistant. “This, of course, does not include the thousands of business owners we impact through our other seminars and workshops.”

The center’s signature annual half-day Think Big Forum features successful businesswomen from around the country who share insight and experiences on such topics as innovation, sales, branding, and growth. And every month, the center’s Women Business Leaders Breakfast Series hosts regional business leaders who speak on a variety of business topics as social entrepreneurship, strategic growth, marketing strategies, and financial planning.

“Working with Rebecca and CWE on social media and marketing has given me the ability to practice and implement what I learn in my courses and has given me an inside look at entrepreneurship and women entrepreneurs,” says Huong Tran, an MBA student who came to Chatham from Hanoi, Vietnam.

CWE recently received grant funding from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and the PNC Foundation to create new customized programs for women business owners and students, which will launch in 2013 and 2014.

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