

WOMEN *IN* BUSINESS

**LEADING
THE WAY**

My Giving Tree &
iMERAKi

**SUCCESS
STORIES**

Dana McKinney
tax business

**EXPERT
ADVICE**

Dr. Larrissa Cali



"Don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them."
- Madam C.J. Walker

8 things women should know about stress

Special to the Journal

Stress can be paradoxical. A certain amount of stress can motivate people to get things done. But having too much can cause a person to resist doing anything at all. The Cleveland Clinic says stress is the body's response to daily events that occur in life. When stress becomes chronic, it can be negative and destructive, making it hard to adapt and cope.

Chronic stress is a concern for many women. The Office on Women's Health says women are more likely than men to report symptoms of stress, including headaches and upset stomach. They're also more likely to have mental health conditions that are exacerbated by stress, including anxiety and depression.

Learning the facts about stress can help women care for their mental well-being. Here are eight things to know.

1. Stress can manifest in emotional, cognitive or physical symptoms. Notable physical symptoms include muscle tension and headaches as well as fatigue and low energy. Emotional symptoms may include increased worry, mood swings or irritability.

2. Stress can lead to unhealthy habits. Women have higher risk of overeating due to stress, and may become inactive or smoke to cope with stress, says the American Heart Association.

3. Common causes of long-term stress include poverty and financial worries. Women in poverty who care for children or other family members may develop more severe stress, says the Office of Assistant Secretary for Health.

4. Women respond to stress differently. Healthline indicates women have a higher percentage of perception of stress than men, and also are more apt to realize they must manage

it. Seventy percent of women have tried to reduce stress over the past five years.

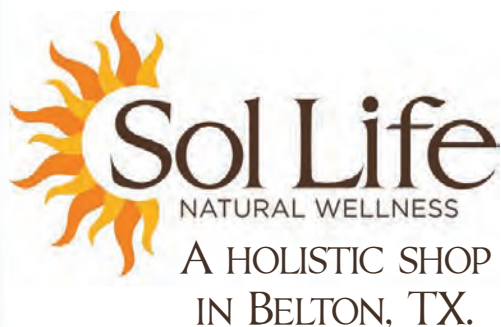
5. Research reported on by the American Psychological Association says women are more likely to internalize stress, leading more readily to both physical and mental disorders. Men tend to be better at disassociating from stress.

6. Women are more likely to cancel plans due to stress than men, despite realizing they could use more social support.

7. Stress can disrupt hormonal balance in women, leading to menstrual irregularities.

8. Stress can trigger increased pain sensitivity, making women more prone to tension headaches and migraine attacks.

Stress can take its toll on anyone, including women. Recognizing help is needed, setting measurable targets and being realistic about managing stress can help women feel better.



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Qualities women bring to business

Special to the Journal

Women continue to thrive in the workforce. Wells Fargo reports that, from 2019 to 2023, the growth rate of women-owned businesses outpaced the rate of men-owned businesses in relation to number of firms, rate of employment and revenue earned. LinkedIn also indicates there are 114 percent more women entrepreneurs now than there were 20 years ago.

Every business owner or employee brings something unique to the employment landscape and certain characteristics are universal,

regardless of gender. Still, there are certain qualities that women bring to the workforce that can help businesses excel. Forbes indicates women employees offer traits that can help drive engagement, productivity, satisfaction, and various other attributes. The following are some of the traits women may bring to business.

Emotional intelligence

Women First Jobs says that women often bring high emotional intelligence to the table. Emotional intelligence involves understanding

and managing emotions and the emotions of others. Women may be more inclined to understand different perspectives and to help resolve conflicts and build relationships.

Collaboration

Women employees often have traits that can foster collaboration in the workplace, such as reading non-verbal cues and willingness to take turns in conversations, indicates Forbes. This can help everyone collaborate more effectively.

Continued on Page 4



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Room for improvement

Women in the workplace continually seek opportunities for improvement, advises Sparklight Business. This can involve taking advice from other workers and peers. Women leaders embrace opportunities to do things better and work to improve their skills for the greater good.

Communication

The IWEF Foundation, which empowers women entrepreneurs, says women tend to be effective communicators and often make great leaders because of this trait and their ability to inspire others. Communication often is key to any relationship, whether personal or in a business setting.

Organization and planning

Women may excel at organizing and planning. Women can look at things with a detail-oriented eye and recognize flaws in plans even before getting started. This means women can be in charge of distributing workloads or organizing the schedules of others.

Adaptability

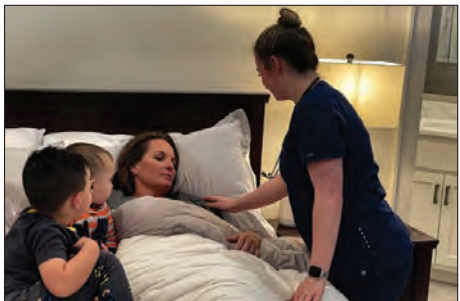
Even though it is a cliché, women tend to be natural multi-taskers. Handling multiple jobs at the same time means women can adapt to changing situations. Generally speaking, there are some inherent characteristics women may possess that can make them viable assets as business owners or leaders in their fields.



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Dana McKinney shares her story about her tax business

By Michelle Rodriguez
The Belton Journal

Before starting her business McKinney Tax Services, Dana McKinney spent over a decade working as an accountant for small companies in Bell County.

“The experience prepared me to take a leap of faith and start my business in 2011. I wanted to offer my knowledge to our community at an affordable price and friendly environment,” said Dana McKinney. “We are locally owned and operated. I reside in Belton, along with my husband Ken and our three children Faith, Quinlan, and Colin.

Dana McKinney and her husband are both Philadelphia, Pennsylvania natives who came to Texas while he worked in the military in 1998. Dana McKinney has been a professional federal tax preparer, an

AFSP record holder for over twenty-three years, and maintains an annual designation with the IRS.

“I enjoy getting to know all my clients. I believe they deserve one-on-one personal relationships throughout the year, not just during tax season. Taxes do not have to be complicated, but with our approach, we just don’t prepare a return, we inform you in a way that is easy to understand and guide them,” said Dana McKinney.

They added the Belton Business Buckle next door this year, as an educational tool to empower small businesses. It will be a dynamic hub where small businesses, from inception, find the knowledge and resources to achieve sustained success. Our commitment is to be the cornerstone of their growth and prosperity.



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Trio has made significant contributions to the Belton community



By **DAVID TUMA**

The Belton Journal

Leila Valchar embarked on her entrepreneurial journey in January 2011 when she opened My Giving Tree Gift Shop & Gallery in the heart of downtown Belton. This venture was not without its challenges, particularly in the early months when Leila had to forgo a steady paycheck to invest in her dream. Her commitment to the shop was unwavering, even as it faced significant hurdles, including a particularly tough trial during the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted many small businesses. Fortunately, the Belton community rallied around local shops like My Giving Tree and iMERAKi, demonstrating remarkable solidarity during difficult times.

Small businesses like Leila's play a vital role in the local economy, contributing over 50 percent to its overall health and providing employment to a multitude of residents. Leila's entrepreneurial journey began in 2010, when she noticed a quaint rental space that piqued her interest. After careful consideration, she decided to take the plunge and eventually purchased a 6,000-square-foot building, which became the foundation of My Giving Tree. Initially, the shop was a mixed assortment of various items, lacking a clear identity. However, through her perseverance, tireless dedication, and a keen understanding of market trends, Leila shaped it into a thriving retail destination.

Today, downtown Belton is vibrant with life, filled with residents and visitors alike exploring its offerings. My Giving Tree has evolved into a well-curated store, showcasing a diverse and eclectic collection of custom-made jewelry, stylish clothing, unique gifts, and stunning artwork from local artists. This focus on local craftsmanship not only supports artists in the area but also helps foster a sense of community.

In 2019, Leila's vision was further amplified when her daughters, Jessica Shelton and Jamie Davenport, joined the family business by opening their own store, iMERAKi. With their shared entrepreneurial spirit, the trio has made significant contributions to their community, organizing events that bring people together, supporting the launch of new businesses, and nurturing a collaborative environment among local entrepreneurs.

Looking ahead, the story of My Giving Tree and iMERAKi exemplifies the values of sacrifice, resilience, and a genuine passion for their work. Leila takes immense pride in her daughters and their dedication to both the business and the community at large. Their collective journey serves as a powerful testament to the endurance and strength of small businesses and the unwavering support of the communities that cherish them. Through their efforts, they continue to inspire others and create a lasting positive impact on Belton.

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Sol Life brings herbal medicine to Belton

By Harvey Jackson Oss

The Belton Journal

Sol Life Natural Wellness relocated to Belton last year. The studio, founded by Shae Stinson, offers a variety of herbal and holistic products and services. The new venue is located on Lake Road near the Quail Meadow neighborhood.

Stinson founded Sol Life in 2023 on West Adams in Temple, after being inspired by a yearlong struggle with her own health. Stinson endured lengthy treatments of conventional medicine, but was unsatisfied with the poor results. She decided to look into holistics, and discovered the use of herbal medicine. When her herbs finally brought her relief, she knew she needed to share them with the area.

“It really was like a voice from the divine spoke to me and told me to bring herbal medicines to the community,” said Stinson.

Stinson is an herbalist, a type of holistic health practitioner that matches symptoms to specific herbs.

“I’m really good at helping get down to root causes,” explains Stinson. Her clients’ problems may be emotional, lifestyle-based, or physical. Stinson also sells minerals



BELTON JOURNAL/HARVEY JACKSON OSS

Sol Life, located at a new location on Lake Road, offers a variety of holistic health options for the local community.

and vitamins, and offers Reiki energy healing sessions. Sol Life also features an in-house masseuse, Julie Rodriguez from Buena Vida Massage. Stinson hosts monthly community classes where she demonstrates things like making bath salts or crystal grids. She holds yoga sessions in the back of the property.

In May 2024 the West Adams area was ravaged by a devastating EF-2 class tornado that destroyed over 500 homes and businesses.

“It kind of took everybody’s lives and turned them upside down,” stated Stinson. Sol Life was severely damaged by

a bombardment of debris and forced to close.

Just over one year ago in August 2024, Stinson moved her business to a house on Lake Road. The venue was intended to be temporary, but she came to love the area so much that she bought the building to establish a permanent presence.

“We have the trees, and we have the land... it’s just a cool place to be,” mentioned Stinson. The living rooms were converted into retail spaces, and the master bedroom became an office. Another two rooms were made into healing areas. Stinson has lived in Belton

since 2008. She appreciates how Lake Road provides her business visibility, being one of the busiest roads in town. “I love this area too, I just love the community,” said Stinson.

Many of Stinson’s original Temple customers frequent the new Belton location. Sol Life has also received lots of growth from customers in Belton. Last month, July, was the most successful in Sol Life’s history.

“We are picking up where we left off,” said Stinson. She hopes to continue growing and serving the Belton community, and eventually open franchises.

Women entrepreneurs who have helped to shape the world

Special to the Journal

The business landscape is continually evolving, shaped by the relentless determination and innovative spirit of visionary leaders of industry. Entrepreneurs come in many types, and a significant percentage of trailblazers are women. Women entrepreneurs have built global empires and inspired many young girls and women to follow in their footsteps.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor says one in three high-growth entrepreneurs and nearly two in five export-oriented startups were led by women, according to its latest report of women's progress in entrepreneurship over the past 25 years. Forty-two percent of all American firms are women-owned businesses, according to EcommerceTips.org. In many regions, women are driving forces behind new business creation. Here's a deeper look at some of the women entrepreneurs that have made their mark.

- **Oprah Winfrey:** It wouldn't be a complete list of women entrepreneurs without Oprah Winfrey. Despite a challenging childhood, Winfrey built a multimedia empire from the ground up, becoming a self-made entrepreneur. From her titular talk show to the founding of Harpo Productions and the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), Winfrey became the first Black woman to achieve billionaire status.

- **Melanie Perkins:** Perkins is the co-founder of the popular graphic design platform Canva. At around age 19, Perkins had the idea to make graphic design accessible to everyone, even those without many design skills. She persevered despite facing numerous rejections from investors, and now Canva is a multi-billion dollar global success story.

- **Whitney Wolfe Herd:** Online dating has helped pair many successful couples. Many have Herd to thank, as she is the CEO of the

dating app Bumble. The concept of the app is unique from other platforms, as it requires women to make the first move, a concept that has helped empower women. At 31, Herd became the youngest woman to take a U.S. company public.

- **Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw:** Shaw is an Indian billionaire entrepreneur, and the executive chairperson and founder of Biocon Limited and Biocon Biologics Limited. These are biotechnology companies based in Bangalore, India. Shaw is known for being India's first woman entrepreneur and the country's richest self-made woman.

- **Arianna Huffington:** Huffington is a digital journalism pioneer. She is the co-founder of The Huffington Post and founder and CEO of Thrive Global, a wellness and health platform.

This is just a short list of the women entrepreneurs that have helped shape the world.

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West Temple Orthodontics serves the community

Special to the Journal

Dr. Larrissa Cali knew she wanted to work in a community that she could be a part of. She found exactly that with West Temple Orthodontics.

Cali had been working in Houston and didn't feel entirely fulfilled. "I come from a small town, my husband did, too," Cali said of her background.

She had been working in Houston and felt that she wasn't able to form lasting connections simply because of the size of the city and the numerous locations she was assigned.

"Here I am working in this giant city. I remember never seeing my patients anywhere," Cali said. "I worked in several different offices throughout the week."

When the family moved to Bell County, that changed.

Cali joined West Temple Orthodontics in 2013. At the time, Dr. Julie Sieh was the owner. When the two talked about where Cali was thinking of putting down roots in the county, Sieh suggested staying local instead of commuting. She wanted a partner who would be a part of the community and could make lasting connections with her patients. Cali wanted that, too.

Cali took over the practice in 2018 and Sieh retired. She jokes that the first year of owning a business is like the first year of marriage. She had to figure out a vision for the office.

"It's trying to find some kind of balance," Cali says, "where we can still have fun and be normal and it's not so clinical."

She strives to keep the smalltown, community feel that Sieh fostered prior to Cali taking the practice.

"The whole 'I know who you are, you know me. I know your kid. I've treated your family.' kind of feel," Cali said.

It's paid off. Cali still recounts the first time a new patient came in asking for her.

"The community has really embraced us," Cali said. "It's cool to see people online asking for [orthodontics] recommendations and see your name come up."

A patient once told Cali they were going to miss seeing her after their braces were taken off.

"I pour my soul into this office," Cali said. "So it's rewarding to see that other people think you're doing it right."

Cali says she believes in meeting people where they are.

"I always tell my staff that our patients can come from different walks of life," Cali said. "I think that's why we have people that come back. Because they feel special and they have been heard. They're not just a set of teeth."



CASA and Magnolia Realty, two passions for Maria Jones Hall

By Michele Weisman

The Belton Journal

The extra mile was coined to describe people like Maria Jones Hall. Whether selling a \$3,000 property or a million-dollar home, care for her clients comes first. Buying or selling, there can be a lot of questions, and she answers them all. Her drive and compassion go beyond real estate, also advocating locally for children in foster care.

"I work to get the best for my clients," Hall says.

Moving to Magnolia Realty this year made sense as its brand strives for excellence. Part of Magnolia's core mantra is "Home is the most important place on earth ... it's the place where a person's story unfolds." While Belton and Temple are her hub, she also covers west through Lampasas, south through Austin, and north through Waco.

If you're looking to relocate to Texas, move within Texas, a military family moving or transitioning to Permanent Change of Station (P.C.S.), upgrading, seeking your forever home, or a multi-generational home buyer, Hall has the experience and education to guide you through every step.

"I put people before profit. What I do every day is provide a service to help them reach their goals," Hall says.

Communication for Hall is huge. Completing over 900 real estate education classes, she empowers clients with knowledge in the buying and selling process. With current market changes, strategy and negotiation are the cornerstones of her success. Clients see the importance of the presentation of their home and proper-

ty. Long hours, constant communication, and open houses every weekend are her stride.

Ask her who she is, and she will tell you she is a wife and mother to two grown children. Her son is an engineer, and her daughter is a physical therapist; both graduated from Belton ISD.

Maria Jones Hall has a history of serving children in the community. Inspired by her childhood experience, adopted after living in an orphanage and foster care, she works to help local children when their guardians have fallen short.

"My goal is to always protect and care for the young and innocent," Hall says.

Serving as Board Outreach Chair for CASA of Bell and Coryell Counties, she is passionate about advocating for children in the foster care system. CASA is a voice for the child. She also serves at Project Angel Tree, through the J.A.I.L. Ministry, assuring children, whose guardian is in the court system, receive Christ-

mas presents.

The best and most endearing compliment she receives as a real estate agent is the gift of friendship. When celebrating the sale or purchase of a home, many clients realize a relationship was built.

Friendships are a testament to how much she cares about her client's and their dream in real estate.

"I want the best for my clients," Hall says.

Repeatedly, Hall has earned Top Producing Agent and Top Agent of the Year. This year, her first with Magnolia Realty, she earned Top Performer in a listings challenge.



**Contact Maria Jones Hall
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New floral shop opens in Belton

By Michelle Rodriguez

The Belton Journal

Last March, a new floral shop, Blooming Belles, opened its doors in Belton. Located at 304 E. 6th St., Ste. 316, the shop joined the local business community with a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Belton Chamber of Commerce.

Owner Tiffany Martin, a Belton native, expressed her enthusiasm for the shop: "Our price point is competitive compared to other florists in the area. It's something to leave for our families. As the business owner in our family, I want to set a positive example."

Currently, Blooming Belles is the only floral shop in Belton. Martin noted, "Many

businesses are looking for gifts and gift baskets," highlighting the demand in the community.

Martin's husband, Carlos, carefully transported the shop's cooler from Buda in his truck. The family is also involved in the business; for example, Martin's sister, Erica Lopez, runs Honeywood, where she makes organic candles with a wood wick. She has produced taper and tealight candles made from honeycomb to sell at the shop.

"I plan to offer design classes starting in June, similar to 'painting with a twist,' but with floral arrangements instead of painting," said Martin. "We considered various names before settling on Blooming Belles after brainstorming logos."

Blooming Belles is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. The shop sells a variety of products, including plants, earrings, purses, flowers, floral bouquets, vases, cards, wreaths, gift baskets, candles, crocheted animals, and teddy bears.



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