

EAST VALLEY LEADERS

FIVE OF A KIND

From Chandler to Gilbert, Mesa to Tempe [and nearby Ahwatukee Foothills, too], a quintet of bustling East Valley Chambers of Commerce have each been marked of late by a new kind of woman's touch

By Eric Mungenast
TRIBUNE

Compared to her counterparts Mesa Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Sally Harrison is willing to admit she's the new kid on the block.

Well, she's kind of new-ish, to be fair — she landed the full-time leadership role in February after spending the months prior serving in an interim position — and is learning the nuances of the role.

One thing she has going for her as she learns more and more about the position and what it entails is the ability to depend on her neighboring chamber presidents.

What makes the East Valley's crop of business leaders particularly notable for Chandler; Gilbert, Tempe and Mesa — not to mention nearby Ahwatukee Foothills — is that, in a business tradition-



Sally Harrison, president and CEO of the Mesa Chamber of Commerce, was proud to bring her son, Blake, a Marine Corps recruit who completes basic training this week in San Diego, as her date to the chamber's 2013 awards banquet earlier this year. [Photo courtesy Sally Harrison]

ally skewed toward the masculine, all are headed by female leaders.

"We work closely, we really do. We have a great synergy," said Chandler CEO Terri Kimble.

Gilbert Chamber president Kathy Tilque said the relationship among the women —

including Harrison, Kimble, herself and Tempe CEO Mary Ann Miller — has a spirit of mentorship to it, due in part to the "girl-to-girl" friendship that continues to develop as the four become accustomed to one another. The person who receives much of the mentoring is Harrison,



Kathy Tilque, president and CEO of the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, is pictured with Sen. John McCain and Arizona Business Bank's Jon Olson, past chairman of the Gilbert Chamber Board at a chamber event. [Photo provided by Gilbert Chamber of Commerce]

who admits she's picked up a lot from spending time with her counterparts, particularly Tilque and Miller. "For me, I learn from the others," Harrison said. "I feel like the newbie in the room."

It makes sense given the tenure the two have — Miller has been in charge of the Tempe chamber since 1999, while Tilque has served in her position since 1996. Kimble leans closer to Harrison, having served as the Chandler CEO for two years after serving the same length in the same position in the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce (now headed by another woman, Anne Gill).

But the relationship isn't a one-sided mentorship; rather, Tilque said the four chamber leaders all provide different areas of expertise within the chamber world — from public policy to growing membership — they pull from.

"Together, I think we can help each other grow," Tilque said.

Kimble added the four will pool together to get lobbyists to advocate for the common interests — as she put it, "when one chamber is strong, that helps build business everywhere in Arizona."

Adding to the camaraderie the group shares is just the nature of the job, as Tilque said there aren't a lot of professions that are comparable to being the head of a cham-



Anne Gill, president and CEO of the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce on Monday, June 17, 2013. [file]

ber:

"Being a chamber CEO is not like any other career," she said. "Any time you can get together and share the experience, because there's no career like it, that's helpful."

Having women in leadership positions in chambers across the country has become more common than in years past, but the chamber world has, historically, been the province of men.

Miller saw that first hand when she first started with her chamber, when she said women were expected to take on "more male attributes" in order to succeed. In other words, she said they were supposed to adopt cut-throat personas and avoid letting their emotions or feelings block the march toward the bottom line.

Harrison's experience was almost the exact opposite of that, as she said the vibes for

meetings had men doing all the talking and women following the motto "seen and not heard."

"When I started, I felt like it was almost a good ol' boys network ... the board had a lot more men, and everyone were friends, and that's good," she said. "But I don't think it's that good ol' boys club ... it has a more professional feeling because it's not that good ol' boys club."

The problem hasn't fully gone away — Harrison said she'll still attend meetings where she's the sole woman in the room — but she said things have gotten better in recent years. Miller added some of the stereotypes that have existed about women in business over the years have started to fade, but they are prevalent — although not across the board — in certain industries like construction.

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Casa Medical Offers Special Service to Provide Diabetic Patients with Shoes

In the past 12 years, Debra Bobbe, owner of Casa Medical, Inc., has inspected the feet of hundreds of diabetic patients, helping them be fitted for the orthotics and special shoes they need to protect their feet.

Her medical supply company and the unique service it provides grew out of a need Ms. Bobbe saw in her own family.

"The reason I got into this business was because diabetes is hereditary and runs in my family," Ms. Bobbe said. "As one of the top killers in the country, diabetes is a problem that needs to be addressed."

She said, in addition to affecting the eyes, kidneys and cardiovascular system, "Feet can be a real problem for diabetic patients. The diabetic foot is a danger zone. They can have a small callus that turns into an ulcer, which can lead to amputation."

Ms. Bobbe remembers her grandmother suffering terribly. "Her feet were so bad, so swollen that she couldn't put a pair of shoes on. All she could ever wear was slippers," Ms. Bobbe said, adding that her grandmother's sister also was diabetic and had her leg amputated. Ms. Bobbe's father and her 48-year-old sister also have diabetes.

All-too aware of the problem, Ms. Bobbe saw a way to help when she learned about a program instituted by Medicare called

the Therapeutic Shoe Bill. The program allows diabetic patients to, each year, get a new pair of diabetic shoes and three pair of the diabetic inserts they require. This is where Casa Medical comes in.

Casa Medical regularly hosts seminars in local retirement communities, where Ms. Bobbe discusses diabetic foot care and assists seniors to sign up for the therapeutic shoe program. As a board certified pedorthist, Ms. Bobbe has special training in dealing with the diabetic foot. She applies her many years of experience to properly evaluate what shoe is needed.



Debra Bobbe and husband, Cole.

"I do all the medical assessment and the fitting of shoes myself," she said, adding that her husband, Cole, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, occasionally assists. "He is my rock and is a tremendous support to me and my business."

Ms. Bobbe said her work is "very rewarding" as patients are "forever appreciative" of the service she provides. For more information about how to receive diabetic shoes or how to find an upcoming seminar near you, call the Casa Medical office at 480-941-9493.