

# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business

TAHLEQUAH  
DAILY  
PRESS



# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business

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**Women in Business 2023 Edition** is produced by the Tahlequah Daily Press. All questionnaires were answered by each individual and edited for correct spelling and grammar only. We encourage the community to join us in celebrating our Cherokee County Women in Business by supporting these women and their places of business.

[www.TahlequahDailyPress.com](http://www.TahlequahDailyPress.com)

**TAHLEQUAH**  

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# Women in Business



At CENTURY 21 Wright Real Estate, we take pride in celebrating the strength, passion, and expertise of our incredible women in business. They are not just Realtors; they are visionaries, negotiators, and advocates for your homeownership dreams. With a deep understanding of the local market and an unwavering commitment to excellence, they make the process of buying or selling your home a seamless and empowering experience.



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RHONDA FOSTER



AMY CARTER



MISTY PARISH



VICKI YOUNGER



SARAH JOHNSON

# Alicia McDowell

**Name:** Alicia McDowell

**Name of business:** MoonDance Photography

**Type of business:** Photography

What is your title? Owner/lead photographer

**What do you do there or what does that title mean?** Being a small business owner means you do it all, from marketing to finances. It's the best!

**When did you start your company?** I started shooting in 2013 and officially rebranded to MoonDance Photography in April 2015.

**How long have you lived in Tahlequah?** I moved to Tahlequah for college in 2010, and I met my husband and wonderful co-owner of MoonDance! Tahlequah has become a community that has our hearts for both our business and our family.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business?** How did you get your start? I truly have a passion for photography. I absolutely love what I do. I love the relationships I get to cultivate through my work. I wake up every

single day thankful that this is my full-time job and I get to do something that sets my soul on fire.

**Are you married?**

**Children?** Tell us about your home life. I am married to Tristan McDowell and get to work side by side with him at every wedding we shoot. I have three beautiful children: Cohltrane, 10; Annalise, 5; and Myles is almost 2. We live in constant chaos, but it's beautiful chaos. I am so thankful for being self-employed and getting to create my own schedule to be where I need to be when I need to be.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career?** Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career? I think the biggest barrier in my career has been seeking a balance between family life and work life. I have



ALICIA MCDOWELL

honestly felt quite a bit of gender discrimination throughout almost 10 years of business; however, it lends itself to moments of being humbled that I live in a time where I CAN own a business, rock it, and also be a mom.

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** I think the biggest demand of working women is the need to "do it all": Ad-

vance our careers, be there for the little moments with our kids, be a good wife, and somehow maintain a social life, too.

**Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor, or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** Tahlequah has been such an incredibly giving and knowledgeable community when it comes to mentorships. I have

had many over the past few years. A few that stick out that I'm most grateful for - among my very first few - were Edna Kimble and Tommye and Jennifer Wright. I have also found wonderful mentorship through our church, and the ladies at Roots Church have been pivotal in learning how to balance everything. Brandi Bryant, Jill Burns, and Marcia Hutchins have been so crucial in my growth as a Christian woman. Kalan Lloyd and Sara Combs have been so vital in learning how to balance business and family. And lastly, Louise Wells, for being a wonderful, sweet friend who reminds me the glass ceiling is merely that, and it can be shattered if I want it to. There are so many others who have made such an impact in my life. I am so grateful for the friendships and guidance this community has offered to me and made me who I am today.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** You are your own roadblock, so stay in your own lane and grow, baby!



## MoonDance Photography



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OKLAHOMA



# Women in Business



Suzanne Myers was elected Mayor in February 2023. As an NSU alumna, Mayor Myers has demonstrated her commitment to the community by actively serving on various boards and achieving great success as a real estate agent. Her extensive involvement and expertise make her a valuable asset to our city's leadership.

Born and raised in Tahlequah, Whitney Shaw was elected Tahlequah's City Clerk in June 2022. She also is a NSU alumna. Whitney worked for the State of Oklahoma and was also a Deputy Clerk with the Cherokee County Court Clerk's office.



## Fire

Angela Retzloff - Volunteer  
Sarah Swayze - Volunteer

## Street Department

Vicki Johnson - Secretary

## Cemetery

Jennifer Cruwell - Coordinator



## Managerial Staff

Michele Collins - Finance Support Officer  
Karen Murphy - Executive Assistant  
M'Lynn Pape - Human Resource Director  
Amber Payton - Cashier  
Rebecca White - Encumbering Clerk

## Court

Mandy King - Chief Municipal Court Clerk  
Ashtin Hummingbird - Deputy Court Clerk

## Code Enforcement

Vicky Green - Animal Control

## Waste Management

Kristen Jones - Driver  
Regina Walker - Collector  
Nikki Warren - Secretary

## Police

Pam Bell - SRO Officer  
Della Combs - Dispatcher  
Sam Davis - Executive Assistant  
Nikki Goss - Secretary  
Jessica McClure - Patrolman  
Alisson Rodriguez - Dispatcher  
Deanna Schiller - Custodian  
Ohavya Soto - Patrolman  
Jaylene Studie - Chief Dispatcher

## Parks & Recreation

Tiffany Coones - Laborer  
Debora Coyote - Laborer  
Tiffany Sien - Recreation Coordinator



# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business

## Molly Tebow, OD

**Name:** Molly Tebow, O.D.

**Name of Business:** Tahlequah Family Vision Clinic

**Type of Business:** Optometry clinic

**What is your title?** Optometrist/ owner

**What do you think helped you the most to make a career as a woman?**

What's the biggest factor that has helped you be successful? As a child, my grandfather always told me that education was a pathway for women. He took me to the university and said, "Become an eye doctor and you can care for my eyes and for those that have trouble seeing." As a woman, I never thought of any other pathway. Get an education and become an eye doctor. His dream became my dream. This career allows me to work in a job I love. It allows me to touch people of all ages.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career? Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?** The most significant barrier in my career is my age. Being young subjects me to a level of scrutiny and lack

of confidence that a young female could be a successful businesswoman when compared to the more seasoned or male counterparts. Being young allows me to have a younger marriage and young children, as do the women that work for me. There are school closings, sick children, family activities, and school activities constantly. As a female leader, I must work with the staff to help them overcome these roadblocks to allow our careers to be successful.

**What mistakes have you made along the way and what did you learn from them?** Do not be afraid to make mistakes. I have learned that by my lack of knowledge in starting a medical practice, could contribute to financial mistakes. Billing for treatments must be done in a timely fashion and purchasing supplies can be



MOLLY TEBOW, OD

done with vendors that are more economical. I could not have the success obtained without the support of my employees to help guide me in appointment making, billing, and tips on companies to purchase office supplies and equipment. I have learned to listen to the women I employ, as they are a valuable tool in a successful business.

**Why do you think companies would benefit from having more women at the top?** Women at the top of an organization

have better insight in knowing how other women feel and can communicate with the other women. Women are known to be multitaskers and are seen to be able to manage lots of responsibilities.

**What advices would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** I always tell my daughter "the easy way

out" is not how you grow and become a good person or a good leader. You must find a career that you really want to work at and enjoy. Be willing to learn from others, and take advice from those who have walked the pathway. Another lesson would be to remember to treat others the way they want to be treated. Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why? It is great to have a mother and grandmother in your life to lead you by example. They both worked in a medical profession, helping provide care to many a woman with high-risk pregnancies and breast cancer. They did not allow their career to get in the pathway of being a mother to their children. They encouraged me and my brother to become the most you can be. They stressed the importance to get an education and give to the world. They showed love to their husbands and children, as well as those with medical problems. I was inspired and hope to inspire my own children.

## Rian Cragar

**Name:** Rian Cragar

**Name of Business:** A Bloom Flowers & Gifts

**Type of Business:** Flower and gift shop

**What is your title?** Owner and lead designer

**What do you think helped you the most to make a career as a woman? What's the biggest factor that has helped you be successful?** My willingness to try new things and to keep trying even if it doesn't work out the first time.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career? Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career? What mistakes have you made along the way and what did you learn from them?** Some days it feels like I make just about every mistake one could make, and some days it's like I'm

on cloud nine and everything's going my way. I think the biggest mistake you can make is to beat yourself up when you're in a low, and being complacent when you're in a high. Things always keep moving forward.

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** I've worked in downtown Tahlequah for the majority of my life. One pattern I have noticed over the years is that women continue to be amazing small business owners. It takes a lot to run your



RIAN CRAGAR

own business, and I have seen some wonderful ladies do it with grace and a smile on their face. And I am proud to keep the pattern going.

**Why do you think companies would benefit from having more women at the top?** Well, we are notorious for getting things done so...

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** Don't be afraid to go for it. Whatever "it" is, go for it.

**Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** I

have had some wonderful women help me along the way in my life. I have had so many teachers, coaches, and fellow business owners who have been instrumental in my career. I also have some amazingly strong women in my family that raised me to be a strong, female leader.

**You are undoubtedly busy, how do you take care of yourself and maintain a good mental health?** Maintaining our mental health as women leaders is so important. I like to read, journal, and do yoga to help me relax. I have a counselor who I meet with about once a week. Setting healthy boundaries between my work and personal life has been one of the biggest help with my mental health since I became a business owner. Don't be afraid to prioritize your mental health.



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# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business

## Paula Young

**Name:** Paula Young

**Name of business:** Young Foot and Medical Clinic

**Type of business:** Primary Care and Foot Care

**What is your title?** Owner/CEO

**What do you do there or what does that title mean?** I oversee the daily operations of the clinic. I interact one-on-one with patients, handle their treatment plans and quality of care.

**When did you start the company?** I started the business in 2017.

**How long have you lived in Tahlequah?** I was born and raised in Tahlequah and have been involved through the years with numbers health, church, and community boards and committees serving the community of Tahlequah.

**What made you gravitate toward this**

**kind of business?** How did you get your start? I have always enjoyed the health care field and felt a need to service the community and the growing population in medical services.

**Are you married? Children?** Tell us about your home life. I am a single parent and have two sons. I was born and raised in Tahlequah and my parents had a business, Cherokee Oil Co., for years. As for my children, Brayden Young is employed at CNONC, and my son Dr. Derrick Young, is Pharm D practitioner at Young Foot and Medical.

**As a female leader, what has been the**



PAULA YOUNG

more independent.

**most significant barrier in your career? Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?** In the past, I came up against career advancement in larger facilities where women had to work harder to gain recognition.

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** Women have become more vocal in their roles of business and

**Do or did you have a woman leader**

**as a mentor, or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** When I was in school, I was able to follow Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller and her roles within the Cherokee Nation. She inspired me on her role as chief and gaining respect of many people.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** My advice would be to the next generation of female leaders is to be strong and resilient in order to overcome adversity in the workplace and serve others with respect. Play upon your strengths and live with self-confidence, and don't be afraid to take risk with grace and kindness. Do not compare yourself to others, but build upon how far you, as a person, have come, and know that hard work will get you through the long road ahead to the top.

## Annie Kingcade

**Name:** Annie Kingcade

**Name of company:** BancFirst

**Type of business:** Financial services industry

**What is your title?** AVP, Treasury Management Officer

**What are the responsibilities of this position?** I am responsible for assisting business customers with online services that can increase efficiency in managing their cash flow and monitoring account activity. I also work to increase brand recognition for the bank through marketing, advertising, charitable sponsorships and community involvement.

**How many years have you been with the company?** I have worked for BancFirst for almost two years. I have worked in the financial services industry for 22 years.

**How long have you worked in Tahlequah?** I have been a part of the Tahlequah community for eight years. My community involvement consists of serving on the board of Tahlequah Area Habitat for Humanity, Tahlequah Main Street Association, Tahlequah Sports League,

and I am a Tahlequah Area Chamber of Commerce Ambassador.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business? How did you get your start?** When I was pregnant with my first child, I wanted a job that was short term. I was hired as a switchboard operator for First National Bank while it was transitioning to Bank of Oklahoma. I also helped run errands and "stuff statements," wherein we put the physical checks with the bank statements before they were mailed to the customers. A couple of years later, I began my career in banking as a teller and have progressed into the position I have today.

**Are you married? Children? Tell us about your home life.** I have been married for 24 years and have two daughters, Katelyn and Lara. I am proud to say they have grown in to amazing young ladies.



ANNIE KINGCADE

managers who have allowed me to advance in my career. The main roadblock for a few positions I was interested in was not having a degree, which I'm working on!

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** The

Katelyn has obtained her photography degree and has her own photography business, and Lara is on her way to achieving her graphic design degree.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career? Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?** I do not feel I have had any gender-related roadblocks in my career. I have worked for some amazing companies, and both male and female

main pattern I see is not having confidence in themselves to take the next step or step out of their comfort zone to try something new.

**Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor, or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** My mom taught me to be independent, and I think that has helped me do what I needed to move forward in my career by taking the initiative to learn and ask questions to prepare me for the next step. I have had a few female and male managers who were always encouraging, offering feedback, and asking what my goals were so they could help.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** My advice would be to find something you are passionate about and make a career of it. I enjoy helping people, and that is something that I have the luxury of doing each day, whether it's through helping customers or through my community involvement. This is what I have encouraged my daughters to do, and so far, it seems to be working for them.

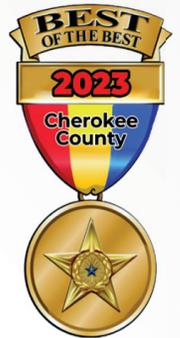
# A Bloom

flowers & gifts

Rian Cragar has been the owner and lead designer for A Bloom Flowers & Gifts for five years. Her favorite thing about being a business owner is creating beautiful things for her customers. Join us in celebrating Rian and all of the admirable Women in Business!



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*CEO and Board Chair,  
Susan Chapman Plumb*

# Suzanne Myers



SUZANNE MYERS

**Name:** Suzanne Myers  
**Name of business:** Professional Realtor

**Type of business:** Real estate  
**What do you do there, or what does that title mean?** This career is one I have been in for 17 years, one that allows me to be an independent contractor and yet allows me to work alongside other professionals in this field. I have an opportunity to help others, whether they are buying or selling a home or investing in property. I thrive on helping others and watching them grow and succeed. I don't know any other way to be.

**How long have you been with the company?** Initially I put my real estate license with Century 21 Wright Real Estate in Tahlequah. I never gave a thought to changing brokerages; this is the place for me. The company was owned by Scott and Tommye Wright when I began, and in the past several years, it was sold to their sons - Jasen, Steven and Brian Wright. We were a great, progressive, and professional company under the guidance of Scott and Tommye, but I have to say I know they are very proud of their sons and where they continue to take the company, and the new heights and accomplishments we are achieving with them in the lead.

**How long have you lived in Tahlequah?** I have been in Tahlequah for over half my life. I came here to attend college, fell in love with this city, and don't know if I will ever see myself leaving.

As many may know, I was recently elected as mayor of Tahlequah. If that desire on my part doesn't scream, "I love this city!" I don't know what would. I am very involved in Tahlequah and have served on the Chamber of Commerce and several city committees. I manage the What's Happening in Tahlequah Facebook group and am currently the coordinator of the Tahlequah Supper Club. I also serve as president of the NSU Alumni Association.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business?** As I mentioned, I feel a desire to help people. I think through my Realtor role and the mayor position, I can fulfill my personal needs of working for others.

**What do you think helped you the most to make a career as a woman?** I, without a doubt, give 120% of myself to my work. I am a full-time Realtor, and you know that means 40-plus hours per week. I am the mayor of Tahlequah, technically funded at a part-time wage, but I spend 35-plus hours immersed in the city business and expectations of this role. I am a property manager of 50-plus rental properties, which is often time-consuming. And I work a few afternoons a week at Beautique and the

Beast, an exclusive apparel and accessories shop for women and men in downtown Tahlequah. I can manage my time and have recently partnered with Jessie Barnard for the real estate and property management portion of my work commitments. Jessie is amazing and I am so thankful for her. She has talents I don't, and I hope she would say the same about me!

**Are you married? Children? Tell us about your home life.** I have

never married, and have no children. At this age, I don't know if marriage is in the cards. I will not settle on finding a husband; no need at this point. I have worked hard in everything I have done and have been able to make a living on my own. I will say I am always looking for the right person, but at this point, it would have to be someone very special. I would love to travel and see places I haven't seen before. I have a tremendous group of close friends whom I trust with everything I own; to get inside that circle would require a real special person.

**What would we find you doing on weekends? Saturday morning at 10 a.m.?** Scheduling is so important. Every third Saturday, I finish up a pedicure and head to pick up my groceries

that I ordered on the previous Thursday. I am then preparing a crockpot meal that will last for several days and then settling into a day of football. Go, River-Hawks and OSU!

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** Pick a career or several that you enjoy and see yourself completely immersed in. If you can determine what drives you, you will never regret your chosen path.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career?** Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career? I have never given thought to how I have been treated and wondered if the treatment was based on my being a woman. If you work hard, without regrets and without hesitation, you will earn the respect and appreciation you deserve. It won't matter if you are a woman, it will be because you are the best!

**Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor, or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** I admire women who lead by example - someone who tells the truth without compromising values and beliefs. You must be willing to roll up your sleeves and stand beside those who look to you for guidance and direction. I want to be that person - someone who joins in and knows the task and can figure out the best way to complete it to the best of my ability.

# Margarett Rippatoe

**Name:** Margarett Rippatoe  
**Name of business:** Abliss Buds  
**Type of business:** Medical Dispensary

**What is your title?** Owner/operator  
**What do you do there or what does that title mean?** This is the first woman-owned dispensary registered with the BBB in Oklahoma. We educate the community on alternative medicines and also hold food drives. In colder months, we collect new and quality used blankets, clothes, heaters, etc. These can be dropped off 706 S. Muskogee, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.

**When did you start your company?** We have been opened in Tahlequah

since 2019. We are family operated and geared toward providing the same atmosphere and treating all of our patients as one of my own right here in the heart of Tahlequah.

**How long have you lived in Tahlequah?** I was raised right here in Cherokee County, Oklahoma, on good ol' school values.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business? How did you get your start?** I have been in health care all of my life and I saw a need for compassionate people in the medical dispensary industry. I am helping to make a difference in my patients' lives by providing a more natural approach to various elements. There's no better

place to serve than Cherokee County.

**Are you married? Children? Tell us about your home life.** I am married; my husband is disabled. My mother has stage 4 lung cancer and has lived three times longer than the doctors have expected, I believe due to cannabis treatments. I have a daughter and three sons, and eight beautiful grandchildren.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career? Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?** I have had some people come in and say this is a man's industry. I am still here standing. I have had many vendors come in and walk

straight to my sons, only to be redirected to me, the owner.

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** Be bold, confident, make up your mind and just do it. You are capable of big things, so follow your heart don't let the naysayers keep you down.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** Don't ever be afraid to enjoy your work and live, don't worry so much about what they expect from you; just go out and get it done. Remember, keep your head held high, relax, and don't take life so seriously. We are all in it together.

# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business

## Adriana C. Scott

**Name:** Adriana C. Scott

**Name of business:** Carson Community Bank

**Type of business:** Financial institution

**What is your title?** Executive vice president and chief brand officer

**What do you do there or what does that title mean?** I'm responsible for overseeing marketing, community relations, and human resources. I also serve as a member on the bank's board of directors.

**How many years have you been with the company?** I just celebrated my fourth year with the bank in August.

**Where are you from?** I grew up in Adair County, then went to college at the University of Oklahoma. After college, I worked in the oil and gas industry for 15 years before I started an HR consulting business. I joined the bank in August 2019, then moved back to Stilwell in July 2020.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business? How did you get your start?** I originally thought banking would be boring. After spending my career in such a high-risk and fast-paced industry, I had the perception

that banking would be dull compared to oil and gas. Boy, was I wrong. Banking is very dynamic. Being a community bank allows us to be flexible and creative to meet the customers' needs. I'm very proud of the work we do at the bank, and the good we accomplish for our customers.

**Are you married? Children?** Tell us about your home life. My husband, Daniel, and I are celebrating our 10-year wedding anniversary this month. We have two beautiful and sassy girls: Elijah who is 6, and Micah, who is 2.

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** Most of the successful women I'm friends with are extremely self-reliant and have a hard time asking for help. When you're a high achiever, knowing what and how to delegate is very difficult. This goes for



ADRIANA C. SCOTT

work and home life. There is no way I can be a bank executive, part of my husband's oil company's management team, a mom, serve on nonprofit boards, run two half-marathons a year, and volunteer in the community without a dynamic support system. I can't 'do it all' and I don't want to. I have an incredible husband who is a true partner. We outsource some of our domestic responsibilities; we have assistants, and family support. Any woman who

says, 'I just work really hard' and doesn't acknowledge the help she receives is doing young women a huge disservice.

**Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor, or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** I've been extremely fortunate to have had great bosses and mentors in my career. Some mentors know they're mentors, and some were mentors I observed from afar. Since the early days of my career

were in oil and gas located in Tulsa, two who come to mind immediately are Alison Anthony, CEO of Tulsa Area United Way, and Angela Kouplén, vice president of administration and chief information officer at the University of Tulsa. Both of these women impacted my career and leadership style, and continue to be resources and thought partners. I admire their strength, compassion, intelligence, commitment to inclusion, transparency, high expectations, and ability to help those around them reach their potential.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** Don't minimize your contributions. When someone says "thank you," or "great job" on a project or task, say "thank you." CCB recently held a leadership development conference for employees, and our keynote speaker gave everyone the homework of just saying thank you (no commentary necessary) when they receive a compliment. You'd be surprised how hard it is to just say a simple thank you, without minimizing or justifying or explaining yourself. This is something I continue to struggle with as well.

## Susan Chapman Plumb

Siyo! It's how we say "hello" in Cherokee.

My name is Susan Chapman Plumb, and I serve as the Chairman and CEO of Local Bank, with locations in and around Park Hill, Oklahoma, the capital of the Cherokee Nation.

I'm a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, and Local Bank is proud to be the only Native American, woman-owned CDFI and MDI in the United States.

As a family-owned bank that predates the state of Oklahoma, Local Bank has a deep-rooted commitment to rural, underserved and Native American Communities. With more than 100 years of history in the Cherokee Nation, we are one of the state's most solid and

steady banks, and we are just getting started.

We are committed to making positive impacts in our communities through our financial services, which are mission-driven and value-based. We service customers large and small specialize in meeting rural, underserved and minority community members where they are. A partnership with Local Bank is a powerful alliance to drive change in communities that are too



SUSAN CHAPMAN PLUMB

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tainable growth. Partnering with Local Bank allows the opportunity to align your brand with a purpose-driven institution that is deeply rooted in Native American communities.

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*Susan Chapman Plumb  
CEO and Board Chair, Local Bank*



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# Linda Cheatham

**Name:** Linda Cheatham

**Name of business:** Tahlequah Area Habitat for Humanity Inc.

**Type of business:** 501c3 nonprofit Christian housing ministry, building and repairing owner occupied houses for low-income families in Cherokee County, Oklahoma.

**What is your title?** Executive Director

**What do you do there or what does that title mean?** Tahlequah Area Habitat for Humanity is a small affiliate serving Cherokee County. In the beginning I worked from my home because TAHFH did not have an office. For a few years, I was the only employee and did everything – advertising, fundraising, grant writing – and volunteered on weekends to help build houses. After establishing an office in the building at 816 S. College Ave. with Kid Connections, TAHFH had the opportunity to buy the building and establish a Habitat ReStore Home Improvement Store. The Habitat ReStore Rack Clothing Store was opened seven years ago on April 1, and both stores have successfully employed full- and part-time people as well as provided a location for volunteers to serve, and senior citizens at risk of homelessness, working with the AARP Foundation. TAHFH provides construction training to Cherokee citizens who, in turn, help build the Habitat houses. As executive director, I give oversight to the two Restores and housebuilding entities, and run the day-to-day operations of the affiliate.

**How many years have you been with the company?** I have been executive director for TAHFH for 14 years as a paid employee. I was a volunteer director for one year before that.

**How long have you lived in Tahlequah?** I moved to Tahlequah 35 years ago because of my employment with the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, Probation and Parole after being promoted to team supervisor. I supervised probation and parole officers in Northeast Oklahoma, with my office located in Tahlequah. At that time, I was not married and did not know anyone except the people I worked with. My first friend was Janet Stucky who was director for the Arts Council of Tahlequah. Later on, I met George and Mary Fulk, who invited me to be part of the Habitat for Humanity program in Tahlequah. George was the driving force that start-

ed our Habitat affiliate. As a member of the founding board, I was able to get involved in seeing the need for affordable housing in our town. Growing up in Bartlesville, I played handbells at the First United Methodist Church from the time I was 10 years old and later directed my own bell choirs in Broken Arrow at a Methodist church. When the Methodist Church in Tahlequah found out I could ring and direct bells, they hired me to direct their handbell program, and I have continued there for 33 years. The Sew Blessed Quilters is a sewing group I belong to. We make quilts for different community needs and have recently started making a quilt for the Habitat homeowners. After retiring from the Department of Corrections, I was offered a position at the NSU College of Optometry as project director for the Vision in Preschoolers research program under the direction of Dr. Lynn Cyert. For more than five years, this project tested thousands of children's eyes and developed the best vision screening test to use with this age of children. After this project was over, I found myself with time on my hands opened a custom embroidery business in my home.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business?** How did you get your start? George Fulk asked me to help him organize the Tahlequah Habitat affiliate and type the articles of incorporation to apply for the 501c3 nonprofit status for our affiliate. TAHFH received affiliation with Habitat for Humanity International in 1990, and I was a member of the founding board. The people I met were interesting, willing to give back to the community and fun to be with.

Are you married? Children? Tell us about your home life. My husband, Gary, and I were fixed up on a blind date and have been married for more than 30 years. Gary is a retired assistant professor from NSU, and volunteers for TAHFH to run errands, serves as TAHFH's webmaster, and does research for Habitat projects. We have one daughter, who is a social worker. Gary also has a daughter who is a critical safety nuclear engineer.

**As a female leader, what has been**



LINDA CHEATHAM

**the most significant barrier in your career?** The fact that I have retired twice from other work and am almost 70 years old has led to people asking if I am every going to actually retire and relax. I always answer, "Absolutely not! I like working for Habitat!"

**Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?** In Probation and Parole, I was sometimes asked if the work was safe, but the men did not seem to get the same questions.

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** It is more difficult for women with children to work and support themselves. At Tahlequah Habitat, we have a flexible work atmosphere and employees, mostly women with children, can bring their children to work if they need to.

Occasionally they work from home when children are out of school. One employee said recently that if she were not able to accommodate her children at her office, she would not be able to work at all.

**Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** My mother was a great inspiration to me. She passed away at age 94. I was lucky she moved to Tahlequah at age 80, and I had the opportunity to be with her those last years. After she was widowed at age 59, she earned her real estate license and went to work selling houses to support herself. She also became a Steven Minister for her church, providing much needed one-to-one care for people experiencing a difficult time in life.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** Be willing to step outside your comfort zone both at work and in your personal life. Be a volunteer and have new experiences. Never stop learning new information and trying new things. Believe in yourself.

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# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business

## Angela Tinsley

**Name:** Angela Tinsley  
**Name of business:** RE/MAX Select

**Type of business:** Real estate  
**What is your title?** Owner/managing broker

**What do you do there or what does that title mean?** I oversee all Realtors and work closely with my husband with the daily operations of all of our real estate businesses.

**When did you start your company?** We started our real estate business in 2000.

**How long have you lived in Tahlequah?** We have lived in Tahlequah off and on for 37 years.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business?** How did you get your start? My husband and I wanted to be real estate investors and business owners from the time we met when we were 17.

**Are you married? Children?** Tell us about your home life. We have been married 33 years. We have four children and four grandchildren. We love to spend time with our children and grandchildren.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career?** Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career? I have not faced any hard barriers as a female. Today's business culture, in my experience, is one of inclusion and acceptance. If you do the work, you earn the results.



ANGELA TINSLEY

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** The patterns I have noticed is that men and women both have opportunities. We are different and I am thankful for that. I don't want to be a man; I appreciate being a woman and I appreciate the benefits of being a woman. I also know that if I do the work, my male companions will celebrate those victories with me.

**Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** I have had more

men mentors and leaders than women. However, my sister, Laura Johnston, who is a retired master chief in the Navy, has been my biggest female influence. She has shown me how to lead well, lead with grace and to lead with humility, honor and with confidence. She has taught me so much and she has been my biggest female influence. I love her for showing me the way in areas where most women would not travel or pioneer.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** Don't worry about what today's culture tells you, what you can or can't do. Discover what you want to do and do it. It's not what they call you that matters; it's what you answer to.

## Chelsea Kester



CHELSEA KESTER

**Name:** Chelsea Kester  
**Name of business:** Tiny Tots Child Development Center

**Type of business:** Daycare Center  
**What is your title?** Owner

**What do you do there or what does that title mean?** As the owner, I am here to provide support for the families and the staff. I work to maintain a positive environment for children to learn and grow.

**When did you start your company?** I opened my Tahlequah location in April 2020 and was able to open a second location in Stilwell in January 2022.

**How long have you lived in Tahlequah?** We moved to Tahlequah in January 2012.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business?** How did you get your start? I have worked with children since 2008 through public school and Head Start employment, and in May 2019, I wanted to open up a daycare center to offer a safe space for children while their parents were working.

**Are you married? Children? Tell us about your home life.** I am married to my husband, Brian Kester. We have four children: Kyla Kester, Makenna Kester, Brayleigh Kester, Maecee Kester. We have two grandsons, Ryker Carder and Daxton Carder.

**What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?** There will always be a need for childcare centers and childcare workers. Education is a great way to further your careers.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** Lead by doing something you love. Surround yourself with people who support you, believe in you and remind you of your strengths.

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# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business

## Marcia R. Hutchins

**Name:** Marcia R. Hutchins

**Name of company:** Josh Hutchins Attorney at Law, PLLC

**Type of business:** Law firm.

**What is your title?** CFO, Business manager.

**What are the responsibilities of this position?** Handling business finances, marketing, human resources, bookkeeping, payroll, and overall management at our firm. I've grown into the role of chief problem solver, fine-tuning our efficiency. Since its inception in 2020, our law firm's success can be traced back to my two-decades-long experience, which began in 1999, across dental offices, a chiropractic clinic, and our first entrepreneurial venture, Tahlequah Recycling Inc. During my first few years as a dental assistant, I balanced working full time and going to school for business management and accounting.

**How many years have you been with the company? How long have you worked in Tahlequah?** Tahlequah has been my home for 13 years, but my journey began in Montana, where I met my husband, Josh. Our quest for a more relaxed lifestyle led us from Seattle to Tahlequah, his hometown. Reflecting on Josh's and my history over the past 16 years, I see God's hand shaping our paths and helping us make Hutchins Law a success, even during a pandemic.

**What made you gravitate toward this kind of business? Tell us about your home life.** Life in Tahlequah, where we reside with our three daughters, offers the tranquility we once sought. Our farm, complete with cattle, a serene creek, and our beloved pets, is our haven. Josh and I bond over DIY projects, family cookouts, travel, entertaining friends, and reflective mornings over coffee or evenings by the fire.

**As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career? Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?** Navigating professional settings, I've faced challenges stemming from pre-set expectations, fear based mentalities, and male-dominated positions of

power. Yet, looking back, those challenges fortified me for my current role. I always try to walk in my truth and speak in truth, even when it is hard. I am very lucky to work alongside my husband, who appreciates my strengths and gives me the freedom to create a balanced work-home life. Not every couple can work together and it can be challenging at times, but it is also very rewarding. An observation over the years: workplace jealousy among women. My advice? Celebrate and uplift one another. Spread positivity instead of harboring resentment. And if you are in a toxic environment, it is OK to remove yourself.

**Do you have a woman leader as a mentor, or are there specific women who inspired you and why?** Over the years, I have had many women to learn from. Going back to my career start in Montana, Marie Stewart, the wife of a dentist I worked for, along with Amiee Ameline, DDS. These women were very inspirational in my love of the work I was doing; they built me up and saw my potential. They both taught me to balance life in general, but to work hard. Marie is so fun-loving and has a great eye for entertaining and design. Amiee showed me women can own and run businesses alongside any man. Fast forward to the past few years, and I have some of the best friends and woman-owned and woman-in-business friends I could ask for, and our community is blessed to have so many women in business. My "Business Bestie," Brandi Bryant of Celeste Looney Insurance, is someone I admire in this community. She is my truth teller and has a perspective on business and marketing, which I have learned so much from. My mother-in-law, Bonnie, is one of the hardest-working women I know. She is now retired and loving life, but her career is admirable and she has such a



MARCIA R. HUTCHINS

servant's heart. I also find inspiration from the women we employ. They show up each day, eager to take on any project, and bring so much to the table. I have an uncanny ability to find problems and create solutions. They are always willing to try new things and help build a better system. My desire is to create an environment where our employees find satisfaction in their careers, but have the freedom to balance life outside of work. I also have some amazing friends who

keep me grounded and allow me to be myself and be accepted despite my flaws.

I have found some of my most valued relationships in the women and families of Roots Church. Too many to list, but you know who you are!

**What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?** To budding women in business: Hone your unique strengths. Understand and value your uniqueness. Reflect on past methods but innovate. Prioritize self-care and personal growth. Embracing one's identity is paramount. A recent revelation for me was the Clifton Strengthsfinder Gallup Poll test, pinpointing my strengths and their inherent challenges. For instance, my strong sense of responsibility often leads me to overcommit, which I'm learning to manage. Lastly, always strive for balance. Remember, it's the quality of work, not the quantity, that truly matters.

is celebrating so many women in business! We support the women in our community and the women in our office!

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# 2023 Cherokee County Women In Business



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Denise, adopted 17-year-old Amina

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