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Knox Leaves Lasting Legacy for Minority and Woman Owned Businesses

Knox's efforts established corporate supply chain opportunities

DALLAS – August 2007 – When Lillie Knox joined the Women's Business Council Southwest (WBCS) as a founding member in 1995, her goal was to provide minority and woman owned businesses with the economic freedom they needed to participate in corporate supply chains. A long time employee of Southwestern Bell and the head of their supplier diversity program, Lillie knew corporate America was comfortable and content with long-term suppliers at that time. "Lillie understood corporate America," says Cheryl Stevens, long time board member of WBCS and VP of Workforce and Supplier for TXU, "she knew that adding new suppliers required more time and came with risk. Buyers were being asked to do more and do it better, cheaper and with fewer resources.



Lillie knew the value of certification and the credibility it would bring to the process to give minority and women suppliers a fighting chance."

In 1995, Lillie quickly established a WBCS certification committee and spearheaded the development of credible certification standards for minority and woman owned businesses, pulling in several other women's organizations around the country in the process. "Lillie understood the economics of what we wanted to achieve before many others" says WBCS President Debbie Hurst. "While others remained focused on the social perspective, Lillie had already moved on to embracing the economic reasons for the development and utilization of companies owned by women and minorities."

These early local efforts ultimately led to the creation of the Woman's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) in 1997 and a national standard for WBE certification. Ten years later, WBENC certification is the most widely recognized and respected certification for women-owned businesses in the United States. Many corporations require that woman owned businesses have this certification as a pre-requisite to participation in their supplier diversity programs.

When Lillie retired from Southwestern Bell in 2000, she took a position as WBENC's Vice President of Field Operations and was responsible for the national rollout of WBE certification.



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In this role she created uniform standards and procedures that helped build the integrity and reputation of the WBE certification to what it is today.

Lillie's legacy goes beyond US borders. WBE certification is being embraced internationally. One example is Prowess, a similar women's umbrella organization in Britain, that has recently adopted the WBENC certification standards and procedures and has begun to develop a formal process of certifying WBEs in the UK. Other countries including China, India and Australia have also expressed interest in adopting the WBE certification.

Lillie lost a long and courageous battle to cancer in November 2003. As a tribute and lasting memorial to their founding member, WBCS created the Lillie Knox Investing for Growth Award in 2005. This is a \$5,000 annual cash grant awarded to a certified woman owned business who is a WBCS member, to fund a critical growth or development need in their business.

This year the 2007 Lillie Knox Investing for Growth award is being presented at the Lillie Knox Memorial luncheon during the WBCS 12th Annual Harvesting Partnerships Education seminar on September 5, 2007 at JC Penny Home Office in Plano TX. The Harvesting Partnerships Education seminar includes a networking reception and workshops that will develop your business. To register for the seminar and luncheon go to www.wbcsouthwest.org and click on upcoming events.

The Lillie Knox Investing for Growth award is made possible by donations from individuals and organizations to the Lillie Knox Investing for Growth Fund which is managed by the WBCS. Distinctive donors for 2007 include TXU, EDS, Shell Oil Company, Texas Instruments, Purdy-McGuire Inc., and The Warrior Group. For more information about the Lillie Knox Investing for Growth Fund contact Flo Cox at 817-299-0566 X15 or fcox@wbcsouthwest.org.

About WBCS

Headquartered in Arlington, Texas, WBCS is dedicated to increasing mutually beneficial procurement opportunities between certified woman-owned businesses, corporations, businesses, government entities, institutions and other organizations. With more than 650 WBE members and 80 corporate sustaining members, WBCS is in its 12th year of providing national certification to women-owned businesses. WBCS is a regional affiliate of Women Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC, pronounced wee-bank) covering Oklahoma, north Texas, Arkansas and New Mexico. Founded in 1997, WBENC has become a powerhouse organization for women entrepreneurs across the country.

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