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National Association of
Women Business Owners

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Inaugural NAWBO Advocacy Award Goes to CPA and 37-Year NAWBO Member

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Some things in life are simply better together—like Linda Forman, a certified public accountant and 37-year NAWBO Chicago member, and NAWBO.

Linda was first introduced to NAWBO before she was a woman

business owner. She was a future partner in a large accounting firm and one of the male partners suggested “a really good women’s organization I should belong to.” She joined in 1983 as a corporate member and a few years later became an individual member.

“I was always the odd woman out in mostly men’s organizations,” she says, “but I found a dynamic, supportive, intelligent group of women in NAWBO and got hooked. It’s been amazing to find an organization of diverse, giving women who not only satisfy my friendship needs, but also my intellectual needs. Their quick referrals always make me look good with clients and friends.”

Today, Linda has her own firm and works with a team of four out of an office in Skokie, Illinois (though the past few months—even though considered an essential business—they have been staggering their time in the office to be safe). They serve mostly entrepreneurs, investors and service-type businesses. For years, Linda has also been a board member for The Lilac Tree, a non-profit organization that provides resources to women in the process of divorce. She has even written a divorce guide.

“The COVID-19 crisis has given us the most interesting tax season,” says Linda of the current environment. “People are amassing their data more slowly because they can’t go see their banker, investment counselor, etc. in person. Collections have also been slower; I’ve had people working hard to meet payroll.” Linda was thankful to receive loans through both the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) during the second round of funding.

Even before owning her own firm, Linda could see the critical connection between advocacy and business success. She has spent more than 30 years lobbying for the rights of small businesses as well as health care issues, both locally in Illinois and nationally in Washington, D.C. She has served on the board of three non-partisan PACs—the Illinois CPA Society PAC, the To Protect Our Heritage PAC and the NAWBO-Chicago PAC.

Susan Gotham, president of Gotham Professional Services in Schaumburg, Illinois, who nominated Linda for the NAWBO Advocacy Award, says, “Linda has been part of the advocacy scene in Chicago since the mid-1980s. She has developed longstanding relationships with key leaders at the city, local and state level that have proven valuable to not only helping to change the policies and regulations that govern women business owners, but also small businesses.”

In fact, Linda was involved in advocacy prior to the passage of H.R. 5050, the Women’s Business Ownership Act, which eliminated discriminatory lending practices, among other things. She helped to make sure women knew about H.R. 5050 and went to the polls to vote.

More recently, she was part of a group that advocated to the Illinois Governor to reduce the state's LLC fees. Ultimately, the fees were reduced by 70 percent—creating a smaller barrier for entry for many professional service-based organizations to start in Illinois. Since this reduction in fees, the state has reported an increase in LLC registrations, specifically for women-owned businesses.

Linda is a member of the Small Business Advocacy Council based in Chicago. She sits on their policy committee, which decides their advocacy efforts for the year and works to get legislation or ordinances changed through state and local government. Today, NAWBO and the Small Business Advocacy Council often collaborate on issues that are important to both organizations. This included lowering state LLC fees.

Additionally, Linda recently used her voice to create positive change for women's health. She heard women with dense breast tissue were not being covered by insurance for ultrasounds needed to detect breast cancer (where a normal mammogram cannot). She first called several dozen of her closest political allies to discuss the issue. Then, when she heard the enforcement would need to come from the Illinois Attorney General (AG), she reached out directly and AG Lisa Madigan and current Senator Laura Fine devoted staff and support to make sure women in need were protected at no cost to them.

Now, thousands of women are getting the ultrasounds they need for early detection.

"Though I know Linda's personal allegiance to a specific party, most people don't," shares Susan. "Her actions are of inclusion and ensuring that efforts are made to work with both parties. She is accustomed to working with both sides of the aisle and focuses on the effort, not the party." Linda even created buttons and stickers that say, "Women weren't born Democrat, Republican or yesterday."

Linda believes this focus on bi-partisan advocacy—both at the national and chapter levels—sets NAWBO apart. "NAWBO has a lot of competition, but one thing the others don't have is advocacy," she says. "I think people sometimes don't realize how important it is."

So what's on Linda's advocacy radar right now? It's PPP loan forgiveness. "We really run the economy to an extent that people don't give us credit for," she says. "We need those funds without jumping through hoops for that forgiveness part. Right now, there are so many holes in the legislation so my passion is getting some clarification and understanding around that."

And efforts like these make Linda and NAWBO better together indeed.

Get Creative to Have Your Voice Heard

Some of Linda's greatest advocacy achievements have resulted from thinking outside the box. NAWBO's partnership with the Small Business Advocacy Council, where they collaborate and support one another's issues, is a great example. As part of an Illinois state PAC years ago, Linda helped put on fashion shows where political candidates modeled runway fashions—designed by NAWBO member companies—to raise money that could then be donated to candidates with records of support for small business. "We got several hundred people to come and raised a lot of money to contribute," she recalls. "We then became their go-to voice for small business."

Linda's Advice to Those New to Advocacy

- Set your fears of talking to politicians aside.
- Pick one or two issues that are important to you.
- Start with politicians who are just starting out—like you.
- Invite them for a one-on-one over coffee or a video chat to talk about issues and see how you might work together.
- Look at local organizations your chapter might form a coalition with to support issues.
- Remember it takes money to run for political office, so it's a win-win to show your support financially—even if you can only contribute a small amount.