



March 2013 | The Northshore's Best

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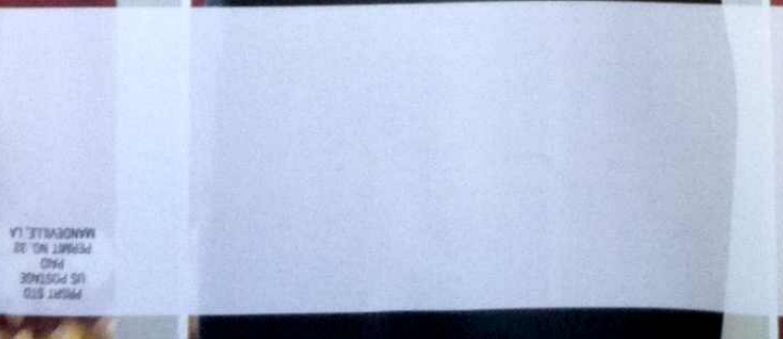


Sophisticated Woman Magazine

Enterprising Women

S. Michele Blanchard, Attorney at Law &
Chairman of the Board 2013
Dawn Sharpe-Brackett, CEO
East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce

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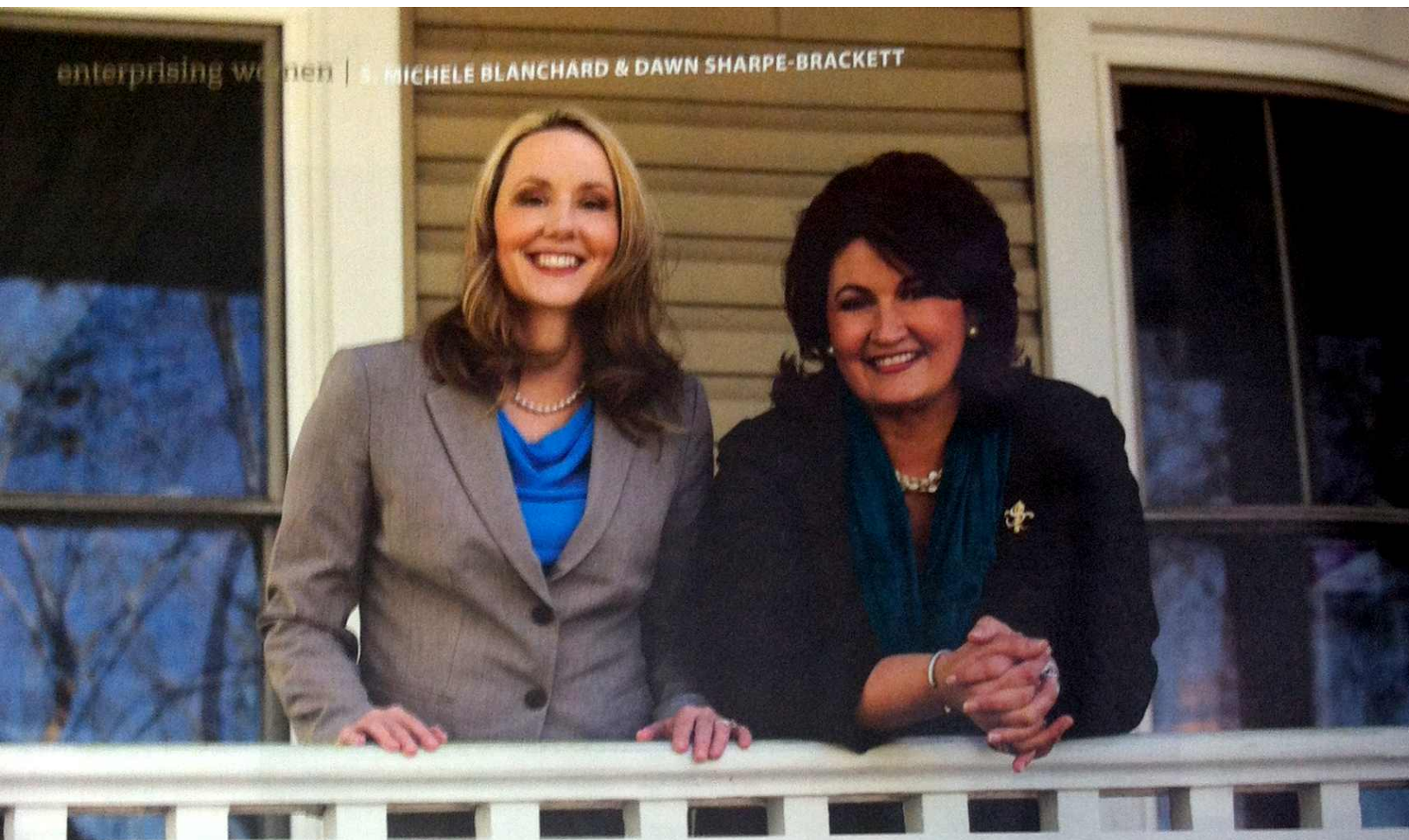


Photo by Steve Randon

Women With Purpose—

S. Michele Blanchard, Attorney at Law & Chairman of the Board 2013 and Dawn Sharpe-Brackett, CEO The East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce

WRITTEN BY MARA BEEBE

LOUISIANA HAS ANOTHER REASON to be a great place to live and do business: the East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce (the "Chamber"). After Hurricane Katrina, and like many businesses, the Chamber faced significant challenges. The hurricane severely damaged the Chamber's building and scattered the Chamber's membership, leaving less than 500 members. Under the board of directors' guidance, which included CEO Dawn Sharpe-Brackett, and the development of a strategic plan, the Chamber has grown into a stronghold of over 1,050 members and sponsors over 250 annual events servicing and stimulating economic development in Slidell, Pearl River, Lacombe and beyond.

To reach the Chamber's current status, Dawn established a relationship between the Chamber and local and state government. That relationship provided Chamber members and the community with

a vital conduit and line of communication. Dawn says the "voice of business" grassroots initiative highlights issues that affect the economic development of St. Tammany. Chairman of the Board 2013, S. Michele Blanchard says that Dawn had a "vision from the beginning" and transformed the Chamber's status during a struggling national economy.

Dawn grew up in Slidell and is a graduate of Salmen High School. She received her Civil Litigation certification from the National Center for Paralegal Training in Atlanta, returned home and worked as a paralegal for 18 years. She joined the Chamber Advisory Board in 2002 and became the CEO in 2007. Dawn was awarded IOM status; a graduate recognition for having completed a comprehensive course of study in nonprofit management through the U.S. Chamber's Institute for Organization Management and has recently been invited to participate in the Certified Chamber Executive (CCE) certification class by the American Chamber of Commerce Executive Association. Dawn states that she felt privileged and honored by her invitation and upon completion she will be one of only three CCE's in Louisiana.

With Dawn at the helm, the Chamber has progressed from "a 3-star to a 5-star chamber" says Michele. The Five-Star accreditation from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is an application process that is reviewed every five years to examine the Chamber inside and out. The documentation took two years to compile and submit. Less than

Photo by Steve Flandon



With Dawn at the helm, the Chamber has progressed from “a 3-star to a 5-star chamber” says Michele.

1 percent of over 7,000 national chambers have received this 5-star rating. As Michele starts her term as chairman of the board, Dawn and Michele’s focus is to maintain accreditation, promote Chamber events and expand communication by being “open to new ways and ideas” says Michele. Michele also stated that, “We need to take time to celebrate our accomplishments as a Chamber.”

The Chamber was recognized by the Louisiana Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (LACCE) as the 2009 *Small Chamber of the Year*, received the American Chamber Commerce 2010 *Chamber of the Year* (the first Louisiana chamber ever), the LACCE *Large Chamber of the Year* in 2012, and was the first in the state to introduce MYChamberAPP (a Chamber smart phone app).

Communication is an important aspect of the Chamber’s overall strategic plan and is utilized through programs such as the Ambassadors, who recruit and retain members; an Education/Workforce Committee, who is a liaison between the local school system and the workforce; the Grassroots Public Policy and Northshore Legislative Alliance, who keeps a pulse on governmental affairs; the Small Business Support Council, who holds 12 seminars to educate and support business and hosts an all day TechSmart Conference each year. Additionally, in 2010, the Chamber started the Emerging Young Professionals (EYP), who Michele says “offers members from ages 21-40 the opportunity to build relationships and network.”

Dawn states that the membership is diverse and is a “matrix of our community.” The annual event, *Starry Starry Nights in the East*, a red carpet Oscar-style award ceremony honors the Chamber volunteers, members, and businesses. The Chamber also puts on the *Business and Community Showcase*, one of the Northshore’s largest free events open to the public with over 125 booths, free entertainment, food and beverage samplings. The *Business and Community Showcase* offers businesses and individuals a primary source to obtain information on the many fine Northshore businesses and the general business climate of the region. The 2013 *Business and Community Showcase* will be held on Thursday, April 25 from 3 to 7 p.m. at the Northshore Harbor Center in Slidell. The Chamber also hosts an annual golf tournament, described as the “best” on the Northshore and a *Fan Up Saints Tailgate* party.

“All our events focus on our membership and every member should be proud to call themselves a member of the East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce, an award winning Chamber. Our members, board of directors, volunteers and the staff: JoBeth Kavanaugh, Kendra Hamrick, Ann Bowser, and Juliette Bloomer, are the driving force that makes East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce exceptional” says Michele.

Both women acknowledge that the support from their families, especially their husbands, is what allows them to achieve all that they do. When asked how they balance their personal lives with the hectic pace of their professional commitments, Dawn smiles and states that they are “women who like to get things done and want to make a difference to our community.”

The East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce is located at 118 West Hall Avenue, Slidell and can be reached at 985-643-5678. Please visit their website at www.estchamber.com.

BELOW: East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce staff: Juliette Bloomer, Dawn Sharpe-Brackett, JoBeth Kavanaugh, Kendra Hamrick, Ann Bowser.





Photo by Steve Randon

S. Michele Blanchard, Attorney at Law

THE EAST ST. TAMMANY Chamber of Commerce's Chairman of the Board, S. Michele Blanchard, wears multiple hats in her community. She is the Chamber's sixth female Chairman (and the second youngest person to hold

the position in 51 years) and owner of Airey Blanchard Law Office, LC and All American Title Agency,

LLC. After graduating from Pearl River High School with honors, Michele earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Middle Tennessee State University, a Juris Doctor degree and Bachelor of Civil Law studies from LSU (becoming a member of the Louisiana Bar in 2002) and received an advanced legal degree in taxation from Boston University. Michele says, however,

no matter where she lived in the world, "Slidell is always home to me."

Michele started her law practice in 2003 and in 2006 opened a title company, All American Title Agency, LLC, which closes

Michele received numerous awards relating to her community service, including being named East St. Tammany Parish Chamber of Commerce Director of the Year two years in a row...

commercial real estate deals and helps individuals obtain the American Dream of home ownership. Airey Blanchard Law Office focuses on estate planning, business planning and legal services. The focus of her practice is on assisting individuals and businesses to solve problems. Michele said she wanted to be a lawyer from a young age

because she wanted "the ability to improve and change people's lives." She helps families through the difficult time of planning for end of life issues by drafting wills, medical and financial powers of attorney and helping clients apply for Medicaid and Veterans Aid & Attendant Care benefits. She sometimes executes wills when the client is in the hospital. Michele also assists local businesses in many areas, including business formation and tax planning, drafting and reviewing contracts and leases and structuring the sale or purchase of business. She approaches her practice with an eye toward resolving minor issues before the issues become costly legal dilemmas. Michele states that she "encourages the firm's clients to pick up the phone and call or email questions" before they make major decisions or sign legal documents. Michele states that it is much cheaper and easier to walk away from a bad deal than try to get a poorly thought through deal undone.

Michele received numerous awards relating to her community service, including being named East St. Tammany Parish Chamber of Commerce Director of the Year two years in a row, and being asked to serve as a Maid for the 2013 Krewe of Slidellian's. Besides her Chairmanship, Michele is a member of numerous organizations and nonprofits, including Treasurer of the Slidell Bar Association, past president of the Northshore Estate Planning Council, and founding member of the Slidell Kiwanis Club and Business Women Network of East St. Tammany. Michele's commitment to community service is the driving force in her daily activities and has become a family affair. Her children are known for wearing Chamber t-shirts at events and her husband, Jake Airey, who serves on the board of the Slidell Youth Soccer Club, is always available to lend a hand. She wants to do as much as she can for the community because she hopes that one day her own children will live and work in St. Tammany Parish and continue her legacy. ✂

Airey Blanchard Law Office, LC is located at 303 South Military Rd, Ste 3, Slidell and can be reached at 985-641-4010.