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# Tulsa World of Gymnastics Becomes an Area Tradition

BY BRENDA MELANCON

Contributing Writer



*SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS: Wayne and Linda Bradshaw have developed one of the most successful gymnastics facilities in the nation in their 30-plus years at the Tusla World of Gymnastics.*

“Teach children they can achieve and they will remember the lesson for life.” This philosophy has been the building block for Wayne and Linda Bradshaw, owners and directors of Tulsa World of Gymnastics for over thirty

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years.

Their beginning in 1976 was not the usual business start-up with a detailed business plan and market analysis. Linda saw a need for a quality gymnastics training facility which met the safety regulations and equipment requirements. “Our girls loved to tumble and were on a small team working out in a recreation center. The next thing I knew, we had fallen for the sport. As the girls advanced our concerns for their safety on equipment, which did not meet the USGF (now USAG) safety standards became an issue. The proper equipment was not affordable for the recreation center and it was time to make a move.”

“My husband and I did not start this to be a business, but to give our kids an opportunity,” said Linda. The Bradshaws mortgaged their home to purchase new gymnastics equipment and rented a 5,400 square foot facility that opened with 22 girls who joined them in the move from the recreation center along with their coach.

After the first year, their training coach took another position, leaving Linda with a note on gymnastics equipment, a three-year lease on the building contract, and children without a coach. Bradshaw, never one to give up, dug her heels in and attended gymnastics clinics, read books on the sport, and slowly began to develop her own program. She used her music degree and years of teaching music to devise not only a pre-school program, which has been nationally recognized, but a developmental recreation and competitive team program.

Enrollment steadily grew along with demand, and by 1991, the long hours and summer heat had begun to take its toll. “For 17 years we survived the winter cold and the summer heat in a non air-conditioned facility.” Bradshaw knew it was time to “get in or get out.”

Linda attended a gymnastics camp run by famed Romanian (now U.S.) Olympic gymnastic coach Bela Karolyi. She was inspired by Karolyi and not only renewed her commitment to gymnastics but vowed to make her gymnastics program the most visible in the United States.

To accomplish this goal, a larger facility and quality coaches were required. Bradshaw found “Building Blocks,” a 22,000 square foot facility with air-conditioning, around the corner from their home of 17 years. Needing funding, Bradshaw applied for and was turned down by four separate lending institutions. Not to be defeated, she heard about the Small Business Capital Corporation program through the Chamber of Commerce.

Bradshaw applied for and received an SBA 504 loan, and in December 1993, Tulsa World of Gymnastics moved to

its new home at 7020 E. 38th St. “Right around the corner but a world away,” said Linda.

Darlene Cushenberry, mother of Diane Cushenberry, Tulsa World of Gymnastics 1996 Big Eight gymnast of the year, reflects on the many years they spent at Tulsa World of Gymnastics. “Tulsa World of Gymnastics offers one of the finest gymnastics programs in the country,” says Cushenberry. “They offer a well-rounded program that includes ethics, integrity, dedication, professionalism, and giving back to the community. The Bradshaws instill family values in their gymnasts and continually strive for excellence in every aspect of their program.”

Linda Bradshaw’s passion for her community is evident through her service. She currently serves as President of the Rotary Club of Tulsa, one of the largest Rotary Clubs in the world. She served three years as a mayoral appointee to the Economic Development Commission. Other community service includes the Tulsa Metro Chamber of Commerce, Tulsa Area United Way, Oklahoma Special Olympics, Tulsa Sports Commission, Oklahoma State Chamber, Small Business Capital Corporation, and the Tulsa Advocates for the Rights of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities Board. She was an Oklahoma Delegate to the White House Conference on Small Business in 1995.

As a young woman, Linda’s first love was classical music. She received her BME from the University of Tulsa, earning highest honors and Phi Beta Kappa. She soon added bass fishing (introduced to her by her husband, Wayne) to her list of passions. In 1971, she was named Oklahoma Sportswoman of the Year and even had her own personalized bass boat.

When asked her thoughts about being in business for 30 years, Bradshaw said “Actually, the reality of 30 years hits home when I find myself teaching the children of my former students. Well into my second generation of families it seems only like ‘yesterday’ that the ‘games’ began. My dividends are reaped daily when I see the productive young people that have developed in our program over the years. Their successes are my rewards!”

In addition to personal rewards, Bradshaw has received many honors including the Tulsa Sports Commission J.V. Haney Community Service Award, 2006; Journal Records 2006 “Top 50 Women Making a Difference;” the USA Gymnastics Shirley Marshak Memorial Award, 1999; Tulsa Metro Chamber Small Business Person of the Year, 1995; and the Tulsa People Magazine’s Top Female Entrepreneur’s of the Year, 1995.

Although the early years were a struggle, Tulsa World of

Gymnastics has grown from 22 to 1,300 students over the past 30 years. One element of the Bradshaws' success is their philosophy of family. As Linda and Wayne meet new people, they become family and that philosophy never wavers. Every gymnast who passes through the doors of Tulsa World of Gymnastics knows that they are a part of a very special family. The building blocks continue to be stacked on a solid foundation: "Teach children they can achieve and they will remember the lesson for life.

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