

# Hispanic Chamber's women leadership conference draws its largest crowd to date

By Ileana Najarro Published 3:19 pm, Friday, June 30, 2017



Photo: Dave Rossman, Freelance



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From left: Marcella Quata, Soledad Tanner and Beth Shapiro talk at the SBA table at the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's annual Women's Leadership Conference and Business Expo at the Royal Sonesta Hotel Friday June 30, 2017. (Dave Rossman Photo) [less](#)

More than 600 women of all ages, races and industries, and a few men, packed the hallways of the Royal Sonesta Hotel at the third and largest Women's Leadership Conference and Business Expo presented by the **Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce**.

Leaders, in the fields of banking, health care, engineering, media, education and more offered up advice on how women can succeed in their careers, seek financing for their own business and generally how to self brand themselves and their work.

"Times have changed. There's more potential for women looking to get ahead," said **Hilda Almazan**, a full-time volunteer at the YES Prep Gulfton charter school.

Almazan, 43, came to this year's gathering with pen and notebook in hand to take notes she could then share with the working mothers she knows that were unable to attend.

**Laura Murillo**, president and CEO, of the Hispanic Chamber, said she came up with the idea for the conference three years ago after traveling the world as a representative of Houston on trade missions. On these travels, she said she would often be one of only a handful of women invited.

"The bottom line is that there is room for women at the table," Murillo said.

According to the chamber, women-owned businesses in the Houston metro area account for more than 30 percent of all local businesses and generate over \$40 billion in annual revenue year over year.

Friday's conference drew in many of these local leading women including panelists **Gay Nord**, president of **Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center**; **Sandy Asch**, author and principal at **Alliance for Organizational Excellence**; **Gina Luna**, former chairman of JP Morgan Chase's Houston operations; and **Kelly Showalter**, research manager at Shell International Exploration and Production to name a few.

Panel topics included using LinkedIn in for networking, the pros and cons of seeking out executive coaching, the multiple services available at credit unions, the importance of work life balance especially for new moms seeking to ascend within their profession, and the general need for resilience in the face of adversity.

"Avoid getting trapped in the nonsense of every day," Asch said. "Keep your focus and ask yourself, 'who am I committed to being today?'"

For **Beatrice Esparza**, 63, who works in shipping and receiving at **Electronic Assembly Services Inc.**, the event felt motivating. While her boss had been the last two iterations of the conference, this was Esparza's first time.

"I see why she wants to come to this," she said.

A big takeaway for her personally was panelists' talk on the importance of engaging in social media as the business world, and society overall, is becoming increasingly reliant on technology.

Samira Mahdejian, 39, one of the owners of Katy Furniture, said it was uplifting to see how far women have come in the workforce since the 50s.

Hilda Almazan's 14-year-old daughter, Mariel, one of the youngest attendees at this year's conference, said she was impressed and inspired by the number of professional working women around her.

Though at first Mariel, who wants to work as an engineer in the fields of animation, film and design, felt slightly intimidated at the idea of attending a business focused event, she pulled out her safety net: a deck of playing cards.

"I don't have a business card," she said, "but I can impress people with my magic tricks."

She proceeded to perform a few slights of hand on an empty table drawing a crowd of curious onlookers who introduced themselves, and their businesses.