



Charline Muller (bottom left) poses with her executive board members in 1984.

# Educator, Businesswoman, Groundbreaking Chamber Chair: Charline Hawthorne Muller Looks Back at a Long and Successful Career in Conroe



By Matt Beardmore

**1990** – The Chamber hosts its first annual Business EXPO. In 2007, this event was combined with The Chamber’s Culinary Extravaganza event in order to create The Bites to Business Showcase.

**1996** – Donna McVeigh, then Chairman of the Board, initiates the first annual Board of Directors Retreat. This retreat has grown into an important and ongoing planning retreat for the upcoming Chamber year.



Muller today



Ads and articles during Muller's year as Chamber Chair.

“Quite simply, for much of the early 20th century, women were not recognized for their role in local businesses,” said Larry Foerster, chair of the Montgomery County Historical Commission and former chair of the Chamber. “They were housewives and mothers, while the men of their families ran the businesses. This was true around the nation, not just in our county.”

Charline Hawthorne Muller understood the reality of those days, but she also never let any of that prevent her from accomplishing her goals. To understand the drive she had and still has, consider that it has now been four decades since she became the first woman chair of the Chamber and she is just now entering retirement at the age of 84. In August 2023, she sold Conroe Wood Products – a company she started in 1997 with James Lumpkin – to her grandson Joshua Muller and his wife Rosalyn.

“I came from a family of very strong women,” said Charline Muller, a Conroe resident since 1945. “My mother’s mom ran a hotel in San Antonio, my mother (Charline Ray Hawthorne) ran the Conroe Creosoting Company after my daddy (Hugh Montgomery Hawthorne, Jr.) died in 1954. I never felt like women couldn’t accomplish their goals. I was brought up to achieve whatever I set my mind to.”

In 1984, a year after serving as Vice President of the Chamber under chair Max Mahaffey, Muller took over as chair. Up until that point, all of the Chamber’s chairmen since the group was first organized 50 years earlier had been men, including her older brother H.M. “Monty” Hawthorne III (1967), whom she worked with at Conroe Creosoting Company after their mother passed away in 1979.

“It was a big deal that she was voted as chairman, but she earned the recognition,” Foerster said. “She was a very astute business woman and was well respected for her leadership. Charline paved the way for other women in the Chamber.”

In the 40 years since Muller’s term as chair, several other women have served in that same role for the Chamber – including Donna McVeigh (1996), Sandra Zwick (2000), Jill Vaughan (2003), Rui Martin (2005), Helen Thornton (2012), Tamara Perry (2013), Danielle Scheiner (2014), Patricia Brown (2020), Dr. Rebecca Riley (2021), and current chair Jennifer Millington.

“I guess you could say I was a groundbreaker, but I never had a problem doing that,” Muller said. “The fact that I knew how to keep the attention of 30 kids in a classroom helped.”

Muller taught Spanish, English, and French after graduating from the University of Texas in 1960 and marrying J. Fred Muller Jr., but when her brother asked her to join Conroe Creosoting following their mother’s passing, she took a Dale Carnegie sales course and entered the world of on-the-road sales. Charline Muller still gets choked up thinking about leaving the classroom behind for good in the wake of her mother’s death, but entering the business world opened up a new world and provided her with a new opportunity to participate in civic activities.

Encouraged by her good friend Fred Greer, the Chamber’s chair in 1980, to join the Chamber leadership, Muller agreed. If she needed time off from her job as vice president of Conroe Creosoting to take care of Chamber business, her brother, then the company’s president, was more than agreeable.

Muller said highlights of her time as chamber chair include lobbying trips to Austin, attending groundbreakings when Conroe was a much smaller town, and dedicating the opening of North Loop 336.

“Being chair was a wonderful experience,” she said. “I really enjoyed it.”

great influence from Chamber personnel, Texas legislature officially declares Montgomery County as the Birthplace of the Lone Star Flag.