

# "She certainly leads by example": Meet Edna Meyer-Nelson, our 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award winner

BY BRANDI SMITH



The successes of Edna Meyer-Nelson are too numerous to list. It'd take this whole issue of REDnews! She came up in the male-dominated banking and real estate industries, making a name for herself and eventually founding The Richland Companies, where she serves as President and Chief Executive Officer.

"A lot of young people today look at someone like Edna and say, 'She's so successful. I want to do that, too.' They have no idea what she has done to get here," said longtime friend Laura Ward, who is President and CEO of Houston Children's Charity.

Those close to Edna can share a variety of anecdotes to illustrate her

work ethic, but a favorite involves The Richmond Companies' first building, a shopping center on Mayde Creek off of I-10 and Fry Road. The parking lot needed to be striped and, trying to conserve resources, Edna got up before sunrise to do it herself.

"We all admire her because she hasn't necessarily done it the easy way," said Jody Merritt, Chief Operating Officer of The Richland Companies.

Her work-hard mentality hasn't changed, even as she's racked up award after award, including the 2022 REDnews Lifetime Achievement Award.

"She'll still volunteer to porter a property on the way in," Merritt shared. "She certainly leads by example."

Edna leads in so many ways – as a businesswoman, as a business partner, as a board member, as a mentor and as a philanthropist.

"When I first started in the industry, most of the events I went to were male-dominated and, candidly, not very diverse," said Abe Goren, Shareholder at Wilson Cribbs + Goren. "Now when I go to real estate meetings and conventions, it is very diverse. I think she, in the Houston area, has been a leader and encouraged women to get involved in the industry."

In fact, Goren shared, Edna encouraged his daughter to pursue a career in real estate, which she's doing. He also said the women in his office often volunteer to work on Edna's deals when she brings them in.



Those deals aren't always the easiest, admitted Mark Story, Vice President of Origin Bank, before adding that he never doubts Edna.

"She has honor. If she tells you she's going to do something, she does it," he said. "She always keeps her word."

That has made her more than a client in Story's book; to him, Edna is a friend.

"She is one of the most wonderful people I've ever known in my life and I'm just very proud to know her and to count her as a friend," he said.

Nowadays Suzanne Klein counts Edna as a friend and partner, but it wasn't always that way. Klein recalled calling her friend Marty Schlenker to find a banker. Schlenker recommended Edna.





"We really started off on the wrong foot," said Klein. "I didn't like her at all and she certainly didn't like me."

But as Klein got to know Edna, her understanding and admiration grew.

"Long story short, I decided it would be better to do things her way and we started banking together," she said.

The two eventually started The Richland Companies together in 1992 and it's now one of the largest women-owned real estate companies in the United States.

"Edna is a very patient person. She works things out. She doesn't jump into things. She's very analytical – and I'm not," laughed Klein. "That's why we've been such good partners."

Those qualities also make her a savvy board member, according to Lauren Sparks, Founder, CEO & President of Agility Bank, the first bank in the U.S. primarily owned and led by women.

"She's been able to help us from raising capital to keeping a focus on everything we were doing that it takes to start a bank," said Sparks. "She's just been a really key person on the board and moving us forward."

That could be because Edna had long been keen on the idea of opening a bank herself.

"She told me her clients had wanted her to start a bank back in the '80s and it wasn't the right time, so when she met me and we talked about my vision, she said, 'OK, honey, let's do this!'" Sparks smiled. "It was perfect. I thank my lucky stars that I met her."

Edna is also a longtime board member of Houston Children's Charities.

"She's a true asset to the organization, to any organization she's involved with," said Ward.

That includes mentoring organizations, such as CREW, where Edna was honored with CREW Houston's inaugural Circle of Excellence Award.

"She's this incredible businesswoman, but she's also a great mentor," Sparks



said. "She's so approachable. Anywhere you see her, people reach out to her and she reaches back."

Even as Edna climbed the ladder of success, she was always sure to lift up the women behind her.

"She is a woman who supports and really wants other women to succeed," added Merritt. "People energize her. She is someone who sees talent and can see potential in other people."

"She's a person you can talk about the good, the bad and the ugly with and she doesn't hold that against you. She'll build you back up to be successful," said Susan Hill, JLL Senior Managing Director. "I think that's the other thing that really sets her apart from other people you meet in the industry: she cares."

Hill, like colleague Cortney Cole, met Edna through CREW.

"She will prop you up. She will also tell you the truth, so you better be ready to hear it," Cole laughed.

That directness is a strength of Edna's, one also cited by Hill, Goren, Story, Merritt and Klein, who described Edna this way: "She treats people how she wants to be treated, which is always fairly and firmly."

"She's very direct and I appreciate that and I think everybody around her does also," added Story.

It's also why Goren added that you should be careful when bidding against Edna at charity auctions.

"You're never going to succeed," he said, grinning.

Yet another example of Edna's giving nature.

"That's just how her heart is. It's about others," summarized Merritt. "She is someone who is extremely generous with her time, talents and opportunities. It's a unique combination."

Congratulations again to our 2022 REDnews Lifetime Achievement Award Winner, Edna Meyer Nelson!