

Media Release

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**Patricia Harris, CEO of the Cobb Microenterprise Center,
Is the 2005 Women in Business Champion of the Year**
--Her Organization is New Home to an SBA Women's Business Center--



Patricia Harris, who helped launch Georgia's first microenterprise programs, has been selected the 2005 Women in Business Champion of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Harris received her award yesterday from Terri L. Denison, SBA Georgia District Director, at an Atlanta luncheon hosted by the Georgia Lenders Quality Circle. She was nominated for her statewide award by Allene Edwards, a private consultant in Marietta.

When most kids were jumping rope, Patricia Harris, at age 7, was busy helping in her mother's charm school, answering phones and doing other chores to help out. With each business her mother began, a beauty shop and later a women's boutique, Patricia was enlisted to help and she learned each business from the ground up.

Harris would later attend the Chicago Conservatory of Music, majoring in voice performance. However, she decided that music was not her calling so she returned to school and got a second degree in business from Ausburg College.

After graduation, Harris worked with the Women's Economic Development Corporation in St. Paul, Minnesota. This organization helped women set up their own businesses and would become a model for the microenterprise program she would later bring to Georgia.

"I became a social entrepreneur," is the way Harris explained her career path into women's economic development. In 1997, Jane Fonda recruited Harris to set up a microenterprise program as part of the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention.

Harris' advocacy helped launched Georgia's first microenterprise programs in joint support with Goodwill Industries and the Center for Black Women's Wellness. United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta became interested and that led to the formation of the Cobb Microenterprise Center, a new program under Harris' direction.

The Center is affiliated with the Michael J. Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University. It offers a 12-week program that provides a foundation for starting a business. Since the Center started in 1999, there have been over 310 graduates from 10 metro Atlanta counties. The businesses that have come from this program include day-care centers, interior design firms, and catering services.

As part of its program, the Center has a small loan fund for its graduates to help them launch their new businesses. The Center has been successful in leveraging over \$1.8 million in loan monies to business start ups.

Last year, the U.S. Small Business Administration approved the establishment of an SBA Women's Business Center at the Cobb Microenterprise Center. The new WBC will offer its own 6-week training classes along with other services to help women entrepreneurs. In addition, Hewlett Packard Foundation funded an equipment grant to outfit a 19-station technology training room at the Center and a 6-station computer cluster for client use.

In addition to her positions as both Executive Director and CEO of the Microenterprise Center, Harris volunteers on numerous boards to ensure that women's interests in business will continue to grow in metro Atlanta.

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