

WOMENVENTURE

Successful entrepreneurs feted

Mercedes Austin leads a tile-making business. Kristinah Dvorak runs a walk-in child-care business. And Lisa Lounsbury has started an art-therapy business. They were honored Friday at WomenVenture's 24th annual "Women Mean Business" expo in Minneapolis.

WomenVenture, a nonprofit SBA-certified business center, teaches, consults and helps finance entrepreneurs.

Austin, a tile artist, quit a waitressing job several years ago to go all in on Mercury Mosaics. It is now a 33-employee design-and-manufacturing company that topped \$2.2 million in revenue last year.

Austin, 42, took WomenVenture's ScaleUp business development class in 2015.

Dvorak, the "emerging business award winner," is owner of Hour Kids Walk-In Childcare in Eagan. Between being a mom and a full-time student, Dvorak knew there was a need for flexible, reliable child care in the Twin Cities. Her solution was a center that cares for children on a walk-in basis, with availability by the hour.

Lounsbury was honored as a social entrepreneur. She combined her passion for art and her skill as a therapist to start Art Lab Rx, an art therapy business. She helps clients overcome barriers by taking her 45-foot retrofitted mobile art studio to those who lack transportation.

Forty-year-old WomenVenture helped nearly 1,200 women over the last year through classes, loans and consulting services.

NEAL ST. ANTHONY

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

MDI, Medtronic, others form coalition to support hiring workers with disabilities

MDI, the light manufacturer that employs a workforce of nearly 50% people with disabilities, Medtronic and Special Olympics of Minnesota have launched the Unified Work Coalition

The purpose of the organization — announced during October, which is National Disability Employment Awareness Month — is to advance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

In Minnesota, people with disabilities are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than the general population, according to a 2017 report from the Minnesota State Demographic Center.

MDI, a nonprofit that makes corrugated and custom-plastic packaging and provides environmental services, is a leader in the movement to recognize the vital workplace contributions of people with disabilities and highlight the opportunity for industry to hire more, particularly at a time of worker shortages.

The coalition also includes 3M, Andersen Windows and Doors, the Arc Minnesota, DPI Staffing and Opportunity Partners. They will work on sustainable employment models based on experience, and assist businesses with hiring and support.

Employees with disabilities tend to be dedicated workers, MDI's experience shows.

Minneapolis-based MDI this year expanded its Northeast facility from 80 to 120 people. Over the past couple of years, it has invested nearly \$10 million to upgrade and expand plants, including in Hibbing, Grand Rapids and Cohasset.

MDI employs more than 500. All are paid at least minimum wage, and factory wages can rise to \$15 an hour.

NEAL ST. ANTHONY

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Debit card is tailor-made for hourly workers



Chuck Denny, left, served his community, including chairing the Wallin Education Partners

Chuck Denny was a beyond his business

NEAL ST. ANTHONY

Chuck Denny, who died at 88 this month, was recruited from Honeywell in Europe to run failing ADC Telecommunications in 1970.

Denny secured a \$2 million lifeline loan that bought the time he needed to take ADC from death's doorstep to a thriving company worth more than \$500 million by the time he retired in 1991.

And Denny's push for better products and a consultative but decisive approach worked. ADC became a Minnesota technology star, posting 21% compound annual revenue growth and solid profitability. Denny credited much of the success to the creativity and hard work of ADC's employees.

"I had an incredible group of people to work with," Denny recalled in 2010. "We just did what you're supposed to do."

Denny did well in business. He covered the education of his children and grandchildren. He also expected them to make their own way. He shared his wealth broadly with scholarship funds, job-training programs and nonprofits that uplifted the disadvantaged.



Star Tribune

Chuck Denny, former CEO of ADC Telecommunications, tutored immigrants and inmates alike.

which has invested nearly \$50 million to support 1,000 lower-income, mostly minority college students annually.

Denny was friendly and curious until the end. During a recent hospital stay, a weakened Denny was helped by a nursing assistant, an African immigrant. They chatted. Denny was pleased to report to his daughter, Anne, that the nursing assistant was a mom and earning a college degree.

Richard Solum, retired Hennepin County judge and Dorsey & Whitney