

# Definitely not male, pale and stale

Six women lead the marketing initiatives for five of Houston's most popular malls

by Sunny McKinnon

**A**imee, Andrea, April, Mary, Tami and Wendy. If you saw these six women across a crowded restaurant, you might not give the group a second glance.

Yes, they're fashionable. Yes, they're animated, more than likely engaged in conversation that's at once serious then sparked with laughter. Yes, they look professional and polished. Yes, they have that certain air of confidence.

If you knew the six on a personal level, you would know that some are mothers and some are not. Five are married and one is a bride-to-be. One's an avid gardener and antique car enthusiast. One is pursuing an MBA. One is a Buckeye fan.

Several of the six majored in journalism; one has a degree in music education. With listings on their resumes that include ad agencies, modeling schools, retail stores, summer camps and commercial real estate, their work experience runs the gamut.

All in all, a fairly typical party – today's women, if you will. However, give the six a second look, for these are no ordinary working women.

Together, the six are responsible for making certain that the more than 65 million visitors who come to their shopping centers annually find exactly what they need, in an environment that's clean and comfortable – catering to every shopper's every whim.

## The marketing managers of GGP

General Growth Properties (GGP) is the second largest shopping center owner, manager and developer in the United States. Included in the GGP portfolio of 177 regional shopping malls in 41 states are five Houston-area malls including Baybrook Mall in Friendswood, I-45 south at Bay Area Boulevard; Deerbrook Mall in Humble, U.S. 59 north at FM 1960; First Colony Mall in Sugar Land, U.S. 59 south and Texas 6; The Woodlands Mall, I-45 north at Lake Woodlands Drive; and Willowbrook Mall in Houston, at FM 1960 and Texas 249.

## Unique talents to the table

Andrea Thompson is the Group Vice President, Marketing for General Growth Properties and as such, over-

sees the strategic marketing direction for nine malls in Texas, the five in Houston and an additional four in Dallas.

Thompson, originally from Wisconsin, said that every one of her marketing managers brings a unique talent to the table.

"In meeting as a group, we realize

team competitions. When it's time for fun, the four pack up and head out to national parks for the outdoor life hiking and camping.

## Making waves at Baybrook Mall

After 20 years in the commercial real estate arena, Mary Evans joined the team as marketing manager for Baybrook Mall in the fall of 2002. She

an avid gardener and, with her husband, shares a passion for collecting classic cars.

## Sing a song of Deerbrook Mall

When Tami Benton, CMD, graduated from The University of Tampa in Florida, she never envisioned that her degree in music education would ultimately find her singing the benefits of shopping at Deerbrook Mall in Humble, Texas. But, here she is – and the mother of three now has 15 years of mall experience on her resume.

"About 18 months ago, Barnes & Noble joined us here as anchor," said Benton. "Since then, we've undergone some renovations that have positively impacted our mall. Both of these were strategic moves, resulting in the addition of 10 new stores and enlarging of others. It's been quite a year and a half."



The women of GGP are in step with Houston's retail scene, representing five Houston-area malls that cater to more than 65 million visitors per year. Pictured (from left) are April Jones, Willowbrook Mall; Mary Evans, Baybrook Mall; Andrea Thompson, Group Vice President, Marketing; Wendy Ellis, The Woodlands Mall; Aimee Geuy, First Colony Mall; and Tami Benton, Deerbrook Mall. Photo by David Hopper

how much we can accomplish working together, rather than as individuals," she said. "Everyone works on what they like and find inspiring, which makes work naturally more fun. Plus, people are more productive doing what they love. And because we are trendsetters by nature, we push the envelope – and each other – in ways that others may not."

Before joining GGP as marketing director for The Woodlands Mall, Thompson, who graduated from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, was a media buyer for several national ad agencies, located inside Loop 610.

After four years of commuting, the mother of two secured a job closer to home, accepting a position as marketing director for The Cynthia Woods Pavilion. She left the music venue to become marketing manager for The Woodlands Mall in 1996, and in 2002, she was promoted group vice president over Houston. She added responsibility for the Dallas malls in March of this year.

As well as overseeing the marketing managers for the five malls, Thompson's two daughters keep her busy with lacrosse matches and drill

admits mall marketing is quite a change, but said it's one she welcomed eagerly.

"One difference, which I like, is that in retailing, we have a number of tools to measure our success," said Evans. "I enjoy being able to see the impact that projects and programs make for retailers. Plus, now we have software to monitor the success of every project we launch."

As with all the marketing managers, one of Evans' goal is to continually enhance the customer experience. In fulfillment of this objective, she is always looking for new, fun ideas and ways to make the shoppers more at home.

"This year, Baybrook Mall is undergoing a major remodel, adding a Family Restroom and enlarging the Food Court," she said. "Plus, we have a few surprises in store for the holiday season, such as massages for parents who are waiting in line while their children visit Santa."

With a high-school-age son and a daughter in college, Evans still finds time for herself and describes herself as

As if playing host to the center's 14 million visitors per year wasn't enough to keep her busy, Benton is also pursuing a second degree in business administration, a path that will eventually lead her to an MBA.

## From Ohio State to First Colony Mall

Aimee Geuy, the marketing manager for First Colony Mall in Sugar Land, knows what it's like on the sales side of retailing. In fact, when she joined General Growth Properties, she had been in retailing since she was 16, starting out at a Kroger doing demonstrations for the grocery chain.

After graduating from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, Geuy moved to San Antonio where positions as managers for The Gap and Guess eventually lead to being recruited by her mall's marketing manager. She was ultimately persuaded to move to Sugar Land and take over the lead marketing position for First Colony Mall. Her years on the store side give her a unique perspective when it comes to working with the merchants.

"My store background helps me talk

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“Climb high,  
climb far,  
your goal the sky’  
your aim  
the star.”

Dr. Mae Jemison

## Smart Moves

**Jennifer Patrick** has joined Himalaya USA as media relations manager.

**Shannon Williams** of BKD LLP’s Houston office has been promoted to director of firm administration.

**Brenda Hahne** has been named director of business development at the Brookwoods Group.

**Tene Thomas** has been promoted to tax manager at McConnell Jones Lanier & Murphy LLP.

**Vickie Milazzo**, who transformed her nursing career 22 years ago by building a multi-million dollar business out of a one-bedroom condo, has won office technology giant Pitney Bowes’ 2004 Best Small Business Innovation Award. The Vickie Milazzo Institute, a \$10 million company and a division of Medical-Legal Consulting Institute, Inc., trains nurses to consult with attorneys and insurance companies on medical-related cases. Company earnings have tripled in the last five years.

**Aimee Smith** has joined Limb Design as executive director of marketing and communications.

**Marilyn Sander**, president of Proaction Careers, has been selected as one of the 2005 Top Ten Business Women of the American Business Women’s Association.

**Estela Vasquez-Moscot** is a new staffing specialist at Magnum Staffing.

**Helen Bishop Jenkins**, a professor at the South Texas College of Law, has been named vice president and associate dean for academic administration at the college.

**Crystal Chudej** has been named a senior staff tax accountant at the firm of UHY Mann Frankfort Stein & Lipp Advisors, Inc.

**Vallerie Spears** has joined Greenwood King Properties. She will work at the company’s Voss office.

**Crystal Bishop** has joined Hawthorn Pharmaceuticals’ sales force.

**LeAnn Lambson** has joined Avalon Realty.

**Mindee Mills** has been hired as the director of finance for the Houston Regional Sports Network.

**Stefanie Drake** has joined Fogarty Klein Monroe as account executive.

**Leslie Maxwell** has joined Greystar Development & Construction. She will serve as the company’s new business development manager.

**Deborah Mansfield** has been named director of the life sciences program at the Houston Technology Center.

## Sterling Bank and its Women’s Business Initiative

Thirty years ago Sterling Bank was founded to champion the success of owner-operated businesses. As the years ticked away, the bank recognized that more and more of their commercial customers were women-owned enterprises. So, in May 2001, Sterling Bank launched its Women’s Business Initiative (WBI) to provide their customers with a number of success-building resources and opportunities, including such activities as training seminars, luncheons and after-hour networking events. The program has become so popular that Sterling Bank is now enjoying the reputation as Houston’s first-choice financial partner for women-owned businesses. Photos here were taken at WBI’s September networking event, held at the Bel Mar on Richmond.



Women caught by our roving photographer are invited to call us at 713-662-3454 (no later than October 20) to identify yourself and claim your free one year subscription to Houston Woman Magazine.

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## Mall marketing managers maintain retail direction

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with the retailers and understand what they are going through. I know the lingo and what drives them,” said Geuy. “Working with the retailers – and of course, always being current with the trends – are my favorite parts of the job.”

A bride-to-be, Geuy will surely find that planning her wedding to be a snap after her years of anticipating and planning events for the mall’s 15 million annual visitors.

### The promise of The Woodlands Mall

Even though she won’t divulge the secrets, there’s such a lilt in her voice when Wendy Ellis, Senior Marketing Manager at The Woodlands Mall, talks about her plans for increasing the level of customer experience and service at the shopping center, you know it’s going to be something special.

“We have surprises planned for our customers,” said Ellis, mother of two. “From the introduction of our Gift Card this month to enhancing basic services to offering little extras to make a mall visit more pleasant, we’re always planning for better customer service.”

Ellis, who joined The Woodlands Mall in February 2004, brings 14 years of shopping center experience to the team and impressive credentials that include accreditation as a Senior Certified marketing Director.

For all her experience, however, Ellis speaks most proudly of her work with America’s Promise, an organiza-

tion founded by General Colin Powell that brings together a network of partners to help enrich the lives of young people in America. During her tenure at Four Seasons Town Center in North Carolina, at the invitation of General Powell, Ellis wrote the guidelines for the Mall of Promise program. Additionally, she has made presentations about the mall’s involvement and the potential for the program at national educational conferences.

### Back in action at Willowbrook Mall

“My mother is a teacher. My dad is a retailer, a grocery store manager. And,” said April Jones, marketing manager for Willowbrook Mall, “I always told him I would never marry a retailer. I didn’t. I became one instead.”

Depending on how you count the years, Jones is either the newest team member of the GGP Houston marketing team – or an old-timer. After graduating from Sam Houston State University in Huntsville in 1997 and a two-year stint at a mall in that city, Jones joined the staff at Willowbrook Mall as assistant director in 1999.

She left the shopping center for a commercial real estate firm in Houston where she developed marketing programs for 17 shopping centers, returning to Willowbrook as marketing manager in the summer of 2004.

“I love being back in retailing, but I have to admit that it’s detrimental to my checkbook,” said Jones. “Willowbrook Mall is growing. We

have 19 million visitors a year, 160 stores. Our small shop business – that’s without the big department stores – exceeded \$150 million in 2003.”

Although she succeeded in her mission to not to marry a retailer (her husband runs his own automation business), Jones has let retailing invade the personal side of her life in other ways, naming her three cats Bailey, Banks and Biddle, like the store.

“They’re very upscale cats,” she quipped.

### Six on a match

“At each of the malls, we make certain that we are providing the best possible customer experience,” said Thompson. “We want to bring the right retailers to our malls; we want to have all the stores that customers want. And, we want to provide a pleasant and safe environment, one where customers can bring their families and stay two hours or all day. This is a wonderful, interesting career,” continued Thompson. “There are so many things I like about it – from the challenge to the people. I feel like I have the best of both worlds. I work with a wonderful group of talented women. And our horizons are so broad, ever changing – fashion, real estate, dealing with the public, it’s all here. And then, ever season, everything changes. It’s wonderful.”

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