s if custom designed to thrust women into the spotlight to see what we’re made of, the 2008 Great Recession sounded the death knell to whatever remained of stalwart gender roles around work and home and made many of us put our money literally where are families’ mouths are. What were classified previously as women’s or men’s issues in the last century morphed into human issues in the 21st century as women slowly and steadily become (sometimes sole) breadwinners, bosses and business owners. The Revolution, it turns out, might not be televised, but it’s unmistakably resourceful and has a Y chromosome.

Some of us got to the game early by taking over the family business out of necessity or by seeing a clear path to blaze and acting on it. Others were always driven to be at the top and then beyond that, or had a seemingly impossible vision before technology paved its way. If ever there were a belief that women here aren’t essential to the economy or that they aren’t at least as strong and as smooth as a fine shot of bourbon, these two women crush the belief under the spike of their heels. Kentucky women: We get to know you…

“When I started in 1997 I went to my first convention for Budweiser and I was one of six women not in a “Bud” spandex dress.”

— Ann McBrayer
“You do the beer,” said Ann McBrayer’s brother when it was time for them to take over part of the Kentucky Eagle Inc. beer distributorship, in the family since 1948. And thus began McBrayer’s journey into the traditionally male domain that is beer. “My dad always let me know that I could do anything I put my mind to, so there was no reason I couldn’t head up a beer truck,” she said.

Indeed. Beer wholesalers would never be the same.

McBrayer runs the private company as its president and is herself a wholesaler for Anheuser Busch products in Central Kentucky. “When I started in 1997, I went to my first convention for Budweiser, and I was one of six women not in a ‘Bud’ spandex dress,” McBrayer said.

In the past 15 years what were only about six women wholesalers has grown to about 40. McBrayer thinks it’s neat. “It was very interesting getting thrown into an all men’s industry,” she said with a tone in her voice that says she persevered and won them over the way women always do – with integrity and skill. “If you knock heads long enough with them you’ll earn their respect.”

McBrayer lauded Janet Holloway and her work in Lexington as a Co-founder of Women Leading Kentucky, the advisory board of which McBrayer sat on to create scholarships for other women and facilitate female business bonds. “It’s important to show how women are getting things done,” she said.

“Doing it,” according to McBrayer, should involve a stint in your local chamber of commerce and some volunteer work for a cause about which you’re passionate. “I think you really need to be a part of a lot of different fingers in the community,” she shared.
“One of the reasons I’m a great leader is I’ve done most of the jobs in food and hospitality.”

– Eileen Moore

As the boss at Caesar’s, the world’s largest gaming company, Eileen Moore steered her company to Business First’s top corporate philanthropist award in the region for its charitable gifts that totaled $13.8 million in 2011. This is a woman who not only has it all, she is a pro at giving it away.

Moore, whose father was a controller at the Drake Hotel in Chicago and whose mother worked for United Airlines, knows a thing or two about managing experiences and lining up opportunities. Bitten by the hospitality industry bug when she was young, Moore said she went to work at the Hotel Fair in West Point Military Academy at 15 despite a dismal pay history, long hours and no female executives.

Some bets pay off.

That her employees think she’s down to earth isn’t much of a surprise to her. “One of the reasons I’m a great leader is I’ve done most of the jobs in food and hospitality,” explained Moore.

From the Hotel Fair to the Waldorf Astoria in college to the Fairmont in San Francisco where gaming came up as a new venture for her in 1999, Moore was always ready for the next round. “I had hotel-side deep expertise,” she said, “[but] I needed to broaden my business background.”

While she was at the Fairmont, she received a call about a gaming company set to use new revenue management software in which she was an expert. The all launched her career at casinos, first among them Harrah’s in Las Vegas, right at “boom time” she said as the Bellagio had just opened. When you talk to Moore, “boom time” seems like the only time she probably ever did anything.

“Traveling around prepping presentations for shareholders and the board of directors was an amazing experience. But I really wanted to go back to school,” Moore said. So Harrah’s agreed to sponsor her MBA at Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Ill., and Moore decided to plan a family. She asked Harrah’s to think about her for some leadership roles when she was pregnant and didn’t want to travel anymore and waited for a spot in New Orleans when Harrah’s opened post-Katrina in 1997.

Promoted to the No. 2 spot in operations and marketing there until 2009, Moore has been in what she called “the top spot” at Caesar’s in Horseshoe, Ind., for the last three years. Moore recalls telling her employees “I’m one lady and there are 1,500 of you. I need all of you to put on the best experience” possible. She’ll lead the way.

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