



***Leone Ackerly Hinzman,  
Founder, CEO & Chairman  
Mini Maid Service Co., Inc.***

### ***From Tuscany and Back Again***

Leone Ackerly Hinzman is an icon among women business owners all across the United States. As an entrepreneur she envisioned and spawned an entirely new industry that put hundreds of welfare women to work. She is a role model for working wives and mothers; and an incredibly proud Italian American.

Leone's life story reads almost like a Hollywood script. Just after the war in 1945 on the east coast of Italy, a handsome American officer, Robert Larkin, meets and falls in love with a poor but lovely young Italian beauty. They were married and soon began their family life together. A daughter named Leone was born to the happy couple soon after. They relocated to northern Italy in the wine country known as Tuscany to a small, poor village called Manchiano where they would live for the next eight years.

### ***Growing Up***

In 1954, Leone's father returned to the USA, looking for greater opportunities to provide for his family. That year, he booked tickets for his wife and daughter on the Andrea Doria. Fortunately, Leone and her mother's passage was uneventful, but barely one year later, that same ship would sink in the Atlantic on another crossing.

"I couldn't believe the running water, the washing machines, and other modern conveniences," Leone said after arriving in the U.S. and settling into her new life. "I felt like Alice in Wonderland!" With her father doing well in business and her mother staying at home, Leone had a good life growing up in Bossier City, LA.

The next major event in her life was meeting and marrying Bill Ackerly, her first husband whom she married while still in her teens. Their family soon included three daughters, Laurie, Shari, and Caren. Always committed to her children and to raising them without external childcare, Leone felt she could be a good wife and mother and still pursue a career for herself. In the mid-70's she realized that with so many women joining the workforce and beginning professional careers, there would be a need for a different kind of person to clean homes – not a servant but a professional cleaner.

### ***A Vision Comes to Life***

Leone's vision was of a professional home cleaning service that would be built with the Deming quality principles and McDonald's efficiency. But it wasn't enough to have the vision. She had to learn how to make it work and to create a science and a system around it. She began by actually cleaning houses herself for several years. "I took off my Gucci loafers, even though I didn't have to, and put on my work shoes," Leone said. In a few years with hard work and determination, she fine-tuned her concept into what became The Mini Maid Service Co. Along with her husband who helped her grow and run the business for many years, Leone accomplished what few ever do--she launched an industry. In 1976 she sold her first franchise.

Leone has been married to Jack Hinzman now for almost 10 years. Her business is extremely successful and still family-run with all three of her grown daughters involved and invested in it. Number 15 on the Top 25 Women-Owned Firms in Atlanta and among the Top 500 Women-Owned Businesses in the U.S. (by revenue) in 2000, The Mini Maid Service Company currently has over 100 employees, dozens of franchisees, and has spawned hundreds of other home cleaning service businesses across the U.S. and abroad.

### ***The real rewards***

Ms Hinzman says that the greatest satisfaction that she has reaped from her business is the knowledge that she has helped hundreds of women who were virtually unemployable find jobs, get training, earn self respect, and become independent of the welfare system. Her belief in this principle is so strong that she has worked on welfare reform with the previous Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich. She is also proud of the many personal stories of employees whose children have been educated or who escaped abusive home environments because of their relationship with Mini Maid.

As a leader, Leone has been recognized with numerous awards and honors over the years. The advice she gives others is simple, she says. "Lead by example, maintain your honesty and integrity, have a sense of self, be consistent, look at the big picture, be trustworthy, set high standards, don't micromanage, consider yourself a small fish in a big pond, and by all means - learn from other leaders you admire, especially from the nice, smart ones!" She said she has little patience for people who aren't nice to be around - no matter how successful they are, and that includes women leaders as well as men. About this point, Leone is clearly unequivocal. She is quick, however, to talk about the many people who have helped her through the years, especially the women who are not only executive peers in business.

Reflecting on her life to this point, Leone feels very fortunate. She has known what it was like to do without material things and even necessities because it made her appreciate those things when she got them. She also believes that from her unique background came the seeds of courage to venture into the unknown with her business and to constantly work at improving it and taking it to a higher level. She hopes these ideals have been infused into her own daughters and will be passed down to her grandchildren as well. She's equally adamant about the importance of raising your own children and of family values taught and modeled by mothers and fathers at home.

Whether she's attending a meeting of the Women's Commerce Club, or running her business, or spending time with her family, it is clear that Leone enjoys life and shares that joy wherever she goes. How ironic that in the past year her life would come full circle. She would once again return to her homeland, not as a visitor or tourist, but as the owner of a Tuscan villa in her hometown of Manciano. Now a part-time resident of the once impoverished but now flourishing community where she and her parents lived some fifty years ago, Leone is in her element. Wine

and chocolate, the past and the present, the Italian girl and the American entrepreneurial “tycoon” splendidly blended and poised to start the next chapter of what truly seems like a fairy tale.

October, 2001

By Susan B. Hitchcock (Creator of the Age of SHEroes)

VP – Client Services

Turknett Leadership Group