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## Women in Leadership Archives – Monica D. Hooks, June 2020

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“Women’s Entrepreneurship: Alive and Accelerating in ATL” featuring Monica D. Hooks, MBA & Executive Director of Atlanta’s Women’s Entrepreneurship Initiative (WEI)

Summary: Monica was born in Atlanta and was inspired by numerous early life influences, i.e., her parents, former Mayor Maynard Jackson, and her entire community. Over the years, she’s become an exceptional leader and a champion for Atlanta and for women entrepreneurs. Her professional experience spans the globe with marketing expertise honed in the corporate world and taken into the “wild west of start-ups” and

entrepreneurship. Fortunately Monica returned to her roots in Atlanta and ultimately became a participant in and a graduate of WEI’s inaugural cohort which helped lead her to her current role.

Throughout her remarks, Monica shared many compelling lessons and stories: about success and failure; the importance of perspective and the journey; Atlanta’s history as a city that addresses problems; and lastly, about how ATL is leading the country with the only municipally funded women’s entrepreneurship initiative.

In addition to learning from Monica’s story, her experience and her wisdom, we also were honored to showcase the 2020 WEI Cohort, 15 amazing women and their businesses. While WIL has been virtual since March, this month brought another unique experience: a terrific video in which each entrepreneur introduced herself and her company – and – with zero technical difficulties! Participants online from coast to coast were able to engage with and ask questions of these incredible women – and even hear directly from several of them.

Without a doubt, women’s entrepreneurship is alive and accelerating in ATL and ATL remains “the shining light on the hill.” Thanks to Monica and the new 2020 cohort, we know much more about WEI than we did before, and now we’re even more excited about what’s ahead.

Finally, in a moment of inspiration, we honored the life and accomplishments of Madam C .J. Walker (born Sarah Breedlove, Dec. 23, 1867 – May 25, 1919), an American entrepreneur, philanthropist, and political and social activist. She’s recognized as the first female self-made millionaire in America and she’s African American.

### Background – Personal & Professional:

- A native Atlantan, Monica calls herself a “Maynard baby”
- Received her undergrad degree from Dartmouth in Government; MBA from the Wharton School with a concentration in international marketing, finance and entrepreneurial management
- 20+ years in content marketing and brand management with projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America etc. Clients included major F500 companies

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#### **Lessons Learned / Key Take-aways from Monica:**

- “Growing up in Southwest Atlanta, I was surrounded by aspiration, by self-reliance, small businesses and prosperity. What I saw helped me understand the paths to better community led by economic mobility.”
- “ATL has a history on putting policies, leadership and initiatives in place to address problems re social and economic inequities.”
- “I’ve definitely had bumps and bruises along my journey and I’ve learned you can be successful without following the Hollywood narrative.”
- “Achieving success takes time; the solution is the journey; perspective is key.”
- “Learn to find middle C (reference former First Lady Michelle Obama). That means knowing what keeps you grounded and gets you through life.”
- “I also learned that I really like helping other people, being an agent to help them pursue their goals. You don’t always have to be the person playing the instrument; you can be the conductor.”
- “The national stats for women-led businesses: only 2.2% of investment capital is directed to female founders and even less to women of color.”
- “What I hope for what we’re doing through WEI is that 20-30 years from now, a kid returns to ATL and says ‘my mother was supported by the city of ATL.’”
- “I wear many hats and I have to try and balance. Often I moonlight at night on my own business. I know I can’t do everything at once. One thing that helps is that I try to keep a lot of physical activity in my life.”
- “WEI is a start-up ourselves now in our 5th year. We are industry agnostic, doesn’t matter what type of business it is. We just look for exceptional women, some pre-revenue, who come to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses.”
- “WEI has four pillars; Business analysis; learning and development; strategic partnerships; and funding opportunities. This is the core of our curriculum.”
- “To apply for WEI, you have to be beyond the idea stage; have a first set of customers; and a proven business model. The application is written and must show why and how you want to / expect to benefit from this experience. There are evaluators (our advisors, city and corporate leaders, etc.) There’s also a pitch competition.”
- “The biggest challenge our entrepreneurs face is staying focused, not getting distracted in today’s environment or any time. You have to learn to cope with lots of variables and that pulls on a lot of muscle groups.”

#### **Celebrating the 2020 WEI Cohort**

- Akissi Y. Stokes, WUNDERgrubs, LLC
- Amanda A. Farahany, Bamboo Services LLC
- Amber R. Lawson, Aspire Construction & Real Estate Consulting
- Ariel Lopez, KNAC
- Denise Alexis, DESIGN-1-1 LLC
- Evana Oli, Beautiful Curly Me LLC
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