

Dr. Pamela Ryan Tingari Silverton Foundation

Entrepreneur of Year Awards Speech
June 5, 2013

Good evening everyone. I am delighted to be here tonight representing the **Tingari Silverton Foundation** to honor Austin's entrepreneurs, especially the social entrepreneurs!

You may be wondering about the word **Tingari**

"Tingari" is an Australian Aboriginal word literally meaning "Songlines". Songlines are sacred physical and spiritual journeys by groups of Aboriginal men and women across the vast Australian outback (typically with newly initiated young adults). The paths of the Songlines are recorded in traditional songs, stories, dance, and paintings. By singing the songs in the appropriate sequence, Indigenous Australians could navigate the harsh landscape. The words of the songs depict the location of landmarks, waterholes and sacred sites. The *melodic contours* of the songs describe the melodic contours of the land over which they travel, so the rhythm of the song is as crucial as the words. In Australia, these Songlines are passed down from generation to generation – as elders sing the land, the tribal law and ancient customs to the young adults - a tradition spanning 10's of 1000's of years.

The **entrepreneurial Songlines of Central Texas**, have in many ways been sung at these **Entrepreneur of the Year Awards** every year for almost 25 years, reflecting their own themes of survival and success amid harsh conditions. I have been privileged to attend many of those Awards ceremonies since arriving in Texas in the late 1980's. **At that time, the beat and rhythm of Central Texas Songlines were barely audible.** (As a young organisational psychologist who'd been living and

working in the very cosmopolitan city of Melbourne, I wondered what sleepy outback Texas town I had ventured into!)

I now know I was fortunate to witness up close the composing of many **early Central Texas entrepreneurial Songlines**. I can picture:

- 🌐 Laura Kilcrease at the UT business school when she led the incubation of the Austin Incubator
- 🌐 Nav Sooch ... a young enthusiastic and idealistic chip designer working at Crystal Semiconductor ... Nav & Dave & others from Crystal would apply much of what they learned about organizations at Crystal to their own hugely successful entrepreneurial venture, Silicon Labs.
- 🌐 I see Joe, Ken, Geoff and Bill – all 30 something, just starting *Austin Ventures* with the huge sum of \$28 million. The \$4 billion AV now has under management way beyond even *their* wildest imaginings...
- 🌐 I see Brian Sharples just dreaming up his first successful adventure, *Intelliquest* ... with fellow entrepreneur, Peter Zandan ... The idea that would later materialize into Homeaway.com and take him to national Entrepreneur of the Year had probably not even entered his mind then, let alone taken flight into reality.

Since then, over 2 decades later, the rhythm and beat of the Songlines of Austin in particular, are literally heard all over the planet. Homeaway.com has listings in my home town in the middle of the Australian outback, 600 miles west of Sydney ... just a stone's throw from the little community of **Silverton** ... the inspiration for our initial naming of the Foundation ... and **where the universal Songlines of both business and social entrepreneurship** beat loud and strong.

With Austin now the 11th largest city in the USA, **Austin's Songlines generally relay stories of success, growth, prosperity.** But the **social entrepreneurs here know too well that with the prosperity of the fortunate, comes hardship for the less fortunate.**

This week, our youngest daughter graduates from Austin High School. She is one of the lucky ones. For our daughters and other students born to a **zip code** on

the **advantaged side of the digital divide**, they inherit **Songlines** that perpetuate prosperity. Born into families in areas like Tarrytown or West Austin, their future is flourishing, rosy, hopeful. Most will complete their high school education, go on to good colleges, and probably earn graduate degrees. They will likely celebrate career success in their chosen field and live the so-called “good life”.

But our daughters know only too well ... there but for the grace of the universe (Or the zip code lottery) go I ...

Kids born on the **disadvantaged side of the digital divide**, in the poorer zip codes - often **inherit more sinister Songlines**. Their future is limited and sometimes bleak. Many of them don't make it to their final year of high school. Some drop out when they give birth as a teenage parent, get caught up in gangs, end up in prison ... or seriously sick or dead before they should be. Healthy and poverty are closely related to zipcode ...

It is often the unsung work of the social entrepreneurs that so positively impacts those on the disadvantaged side of the divide. But we have seen through our Foundation and so many other Foundations that the most potent impacts occur **when business and social entrepreneurs work together ... their songs informing each other, harmoniously blending together into common Songlines** - songs of survival and prosperity for all of us, not just the fortunate few.

I also work closely with international NGO Psychology Beyond Borders. Our mantra is “*do no further harm*”. Some business and social initiatives do do harm. Our own research into the **psychology of micro-financing** shows that microfinancing is not as universally beneficial as the dominant narrative suggests. In some communities, where women are particularly empowered, microfinancing can inadvertently change the power structures in families and communities, leading to increases in domestic violence as men become disempowered and lose control. The **best social entrepreneurs** know how to

design effective programs in ways that avoid these and other potential negative impacts.

And so it is the **dedicated social entrepreneurs we lastly recognize here tonight – who have shared with us their Songlines - Songlines rich with empathy and compassion, Songlines of respect and empowerment** - so those less fortunate can navigate their paths out of the challenging life predicaments in which they find themselves ... creating new *future* Songlines - where everyone has an opportunity to fulfill his or her own unique potential, not hindered by the trajectory their suburb of birth may typically put in motion...

Tonight, I am deeply honoured to honour you, **the outstanding social entrepreneurs of Central Texas for 2013.**

The finalists for the Social Entrepreneur of 2013 are:

-  *Karen LaShelle, Creative Action*
-  *Joyce McDonald, Frameworks Community Development Corporation*
-  *Ronda Rutledge, Sustainable Food Center*
-  *Max Elliott, Urban Roots*

And the winner of the **Tingari-Silverton Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award**, and the grant of \$100,000 to her organisation, is Joyce McDonald, Frameworks Community Development Corporation.