AWARD SPEECH

FOR

LINDA McPHERSON

Hello everyone!! It’s always a privilege and a pleasure to be in the company of all of you talented, committed, enthusiastic people and tonight is beyond that. I want to thank all of you for being here and supporting this great organization and this incredibly worthwhile occasion. We are particularly honored to have some very distinguished guests here tonight and I would like to thank Mayor Winters, Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Congressman Zinke for being here to share in the festivities. Your presence and support for this event shows every citizen of Great Falls… and beyond what it means to be involved in a community that works together to encourage its constituents. To Art, Rebecca, the Great Falls Development Authority and to all of you from Embark, the work you do and the opportunities you provide for everyone in this community are precious gifts. It’s really true that being associated with this organization is the reward. To have been nominated was a blessing… Let’s face it-we do what we do because of who we are and it is in our fundamental nature to constantly nurture and express our dedication to our professions, our companies, our family, friends and community. We all “go to the well” every day and find the ways to regenerate and prevail in all that we do. We don’t work with all of this passion and fervor with the goal of being acknowledged, but you know what? It sure is nice!!! I’m thrilled to be here, to accept my award and to celebrate our other award recipients tonight. I want to express my most sincere thanks to the crowning committee and to all who participated in the nominations. Whether or not you voted for me in particular doesn’t really matter. What matters is the support that you demonstrate for the women entrepreneurs in our area. It is so refreshing to come together as a community to collectively shine a light on accomplishment and as we tell our stories and listen to others, we open the door for young, fearless and fabulous women to find the fire within themselves to inherit the torches we have ignited. An example of that inspiration is tonight’s recipient of the Aspire Award, Amber Fern. Congratulations Amber! You’ve been in business for one year and the observations and experiences you’ve had so far provide a unique perspective for women entering the business arena. It’s exciting to witness your growth as you train your lens on capturing those precious moments and that focus will serve you well as your business continues to bloom.

Women have been making history since the beginning of time, but it’s only in the past twenty years that we’ve been given the full month of March to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions we all make to our families, friends, businesses and the collective community. Melinda Gates has said, “A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult.” Thanks to organizations like the Great Falls Development Authority and Embark, the mandate to find our voices has found its mentor and cheerleader. The Fire Within celebration fulfills its purpose each year by igniting excitement and renewed commitment for the work we do. It’s so refreshing to meet all of you and to learn such individual and interesting stories. We do belong to a sisterhood that appreciates the common struggle inherent in owning a business. Thanks to Embark and this organization, we get to learn, grow, acknowledge each other and realize we are not alone.

Five years ago I had the pleasure of opening a truly beautiful invitation. It was for the Fire Within. They got me!! My curiosity was piqued and so I attended that event. I will always remember the first Inspire Award recipient, Cari Yturri. Since then there have been some amazing and inspiring women who continue to light the fires in their respective entrepreneurial fields. Sandra Johnson Thares, Alison Fried, and Penny Rubner… thank you all for continuing to inspire all of us.

As Amber acknowledges her aspirations in her business, I thought I would take a few moments to look over my shoulder and acknowledge the path I took to this very spot here tonight. Ever since the day that Rebecca and Lillian paid me that wonderful visit, I’ve been thinking about my career and just how much this award means to me. I grew up in Dillon and attended Maddio’s Beauty College in Helena. That was in 1978. The next year I returned to Dillon and opened my first salon. I was officially in the business of beauty. Who would have ever dreamed that thirty-seven years later I would be here accepting this award. Throughout that time my career and experience morphed and adapted to the times. From teaching color theory to navigating the subtleties of owning a booth rental salon to creating, teaching and nurturing the next generation of aestheticians, here I am. Along the way I took courses, learned what worked, adapted to the demands of the day. I met wonderful people like Call Fuss, the owner of Beaches in Montana and Wyoming, who asked me to consider a consulting opportunity in Wyoming. I may have originally chosen Brita Larson as my consultant but over the years she has become a trusted friend and mentor. It was Brita who encouraged us to search an academy model in Iowa. Two days later my husband Mike and I purchased the rights to open academies in Montana. With every challenge came opportunity… If there’s one thing I learned along the way it’s that we just have to be tenacious enough to find that glimmer of change. Every connection and every opportunity to keep an open mind and learn something new informed my journey and I am so thankful for everyone I met and everything I learned along the way. There’s a line in a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson that goes, “I am part of all that I have met.” I am proud to be a part of all of my mentors and colleagues, students and employees, family and friends who have stood behind me and beside me to encourage, challenge, commiserate. They are my mirror and my strength. None of this would have been possible without the love and support of my devoted husband Michael, my sons, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, my business partners, my staff, my students, and my clients. I learn from each one of you every day.

Before I excuse myself from this podium, I’d like to invite each one of you to do something for me. Take a look around you. Look at the people at your table and those across the room. Think about the impact these people have made on your life and your community. Think about who inspires you and what goals you yourself aspire to in the coming year. Imagine the fun we’ll all have nurturing, mentoring, and learning!!

Finally I want to say that my dream has always been to educate and encourage those who are interested in the beauty industry. I want to continue my respectful, elegant revolution within this profession, one student at a time. I am so grateful to be able to spread that message through our work at our Montana Academy of Salons and through my participation as I represent the Montana State Relations Committee through AACS.

It is with great gratitude that I’d like to again thank EMBARK and Fire Within. The recognition EMBARK brings to the community and the impact this nomination and award have had on my businesses and my life has been profound. Remember also that although March may officially be Women’s History Month, the brave, bold and beautiful women in our lives make indelible contributions… big and small… every single day. I would also like to add that I’d like to inspire everyone here partner with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_to inquire about how you can participate with us… Thank you all!