**WELCOME SPEECH**

**FOR**

**PATRICIA SIMMONS**

Hello everyone!!! It’s wonderful to be here with all of you tonight, kicking up our heels, having fun, whetting our appetites, and indulging in every woman’s **PRIORITY** **SPORT… POWER SHOPPING**…. especially for handbags!!! And if that weren’t enough, we’re here to support our favorite and most worthwhile organization, Dress For Success Tulsa. For the past several years, many of you have been here to contribute to this cause and participate in this event, and as with the organization as a whole, we honor and cherish our faithful supporters… At the same time, it is gratifying to see new faces, eager to work with us, to fulfill the mission of DFS, and to honor the women we serve…. our clients. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the work we do. We give more than hope to those that really need encouragement, and thanks to your collective generosity and enthusiasm, this organization, and this Tulsa chapter, in particular, has had a significant impact where it’s really needed and appreciated the most. It was Kate Hodges who said, “Behind every great woman…. Is **ANOTHER** great woman.” I am so proud to be a part of so much positivity, encouragement,, and **ACTION**.

To our corporate sponsors, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, thank you for your generosity and partnership to make this event an annual highlight! To those of you who have donated purses for this event, please accept our sincere gratitude… and now that you’ve made some room in your closets, you know what to do… **BID**!!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). To all of the volunteers thank you so much for being tireless, selfless, and resourceful in helping coordinate this evening. To my co-chairs, Terri and Patti, what can I say??? You are the driving forces that create the vision, organize everything to the last detail, and make sure all goes brilliantly in putting this event together.  I **SERIOUSLY** could **NOT** do this without **YOU**.

We’re here tonight to indulge our appetites and fantasies and to hopefully have the winning bid on the handbag of our dreams… because we **CAN**. The proceeds of our special night go to realizing the dreams of women…. dreams that others might take for granted. If you’re in this room, you’ve been blessed with abundance… a surplus of conscience, resources, and compassion. That goes a long way in fulfilling the dreams of clients who have goals to be able to work and to provide for themselves and their families, more often than not, in ways that were not possible previously. Talk about a **WIN** **WIN**!!! Has doing good ever been this much **FUN**??

Of course, since there are **OVER** 180 handbags up for bid in the **SILENT** auction, one might think the audible excitement element has been removed, but let’s face it, this is the **FIFTH** annual purse event, and as we well know, there’s **NOTHING** silent about the enthusiasm this crowd displays when it comes to checking out, bidding on, and ultimately winning the items we have on offer!!! … and don’t forget the **TWENTY** items up for bid in the live auction…. And when we say **LIVE**… we **MEAN IT**!!! We expect to see things move pretty quickly!! We’re here tonight with some very special “guests” with some **VERY** special names… Prada, Louis Vuitton, Michael Kors, Coach, Tory Burch…. Have the winning strategy and they’ll be going home with **YOU**!!!

Tonight we’re “Puttin on the Ritz,” as we celebrate The Great Gatsby, the Roaring Twenties, and the carefree, over the top, luxe life depicted in that classic. Just seeing you here, in your “flapper finery,” does so much to evoke that spirit of fun and the appreciation of the finer things in life, and tonight, we escape back, in our magical time machine, to a place in history, even if for a moment, that showed us how opulence and elegance can rule. It was Daisy Buchanan herself, the icon of the story, who said of one of her contemporaries, “I hope she’ll be a fool. That’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful fool.”….. Now, we **ALL** **KNOW** that although you **ALL look BEAUTIFUL,** there are **NO** fools in **THIS** crowd…. unless you’re going to be a “fool for the love of a gorgeous handbag!!!” If so… **BRING IT ON**!!!

…And please excuse me while I state the **OBVIOUS**… over **TWO HUNDRED** of our patrons are here tonight…. That’s over two hundred people who **CARE**… people who realize that if someone needs a boost in life, they’re the ones that will help get it done. Two hundred plus people who know, to their core, that unless **EVERYONE** wins, **NO** **ONE** wins. We may support individual women in achieving their goals with educational programs, coaching, job opportunities, and work wardrobes, but the reality is that our work builds communities… **LITERALLY OUR COMMUNITIES**…. Communities of self confident, aware, capable, and dignified professionals, and that, in turn, works to heal and build the world around us while encouraging and inspiring future generations of capable, strong girls and women. I think we can all agree that is something needed for **ALL** of us now, more than ever. I’ve heard it said, “More and more women are realizing that only **collective** strength will allow us to be free to fight for the kind of society that meets basic human needs.” I am so proud to be a part of this particular collective. I appreciate all of you, more than you know, and I thank you all!!