



“Baylor... integrates academic excellence with the pursuit of serving God.”

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Silicon Valley, the home of the technology industry, is considered a center of innovation and wealth. According to city-data.com, Palo Alto had an estimated per capita income of \$73,970 in 2012. Yet, in neighboring East Palo Alto, wedged between Facebook headquarters and Stanford University, **the estimated per capita income was \$17,141.** The income disparity is undeniable. Addressing the inequality in the heart of Silicon Valley poses unique challenges and opportunities.

“**W**hat’s happening in Silicon Valley is a reflection of what’s happening in the rest of the country,” Baylor Business alumna Sue Johnson said. “Silicon Valley attracts the best and brightest from around the world. Many middle-income jobs have disappeared because of outsourcing or technological advancements. We have high-paying, high-skill jobs and then, low-skill service jobs—there are few jobs in the middle. This economy has a huge income gap. In Silicon Valley, we are creating all this wealth and innovation, but there’s a growing number of people who are stuck in poverty.”

This is the reality that keeps Johnson working in East Palo Alto, rather than resuming her international business career. **As the director of programs for Able Works, located in East Palo Alto, Johnson works to not just alleviate the effects of poverty, but to provide people with what they need to attain and maintain economic self-sufficiency.** The mission of Able Works is to equip individuals with financial education, life skills and assets that enable them to live free from oppression and poverty.

The organization offers two innovative programs, FutureProfits™ and LiveAble: Women. Both embody some of the same principles Silicon Valley companies use to create discontinuous changes in markets. FutureProfits™ is an education program that partners with local organizations and public high schools to target under-resourced high school students at risk of being caught in generational cycles of poverty.

Through this program, Able Works teaches more than 500 students weekly about fundamental financial paradigms, life and job skills, and detrimental myths about money. LiveAble: Women combines individual attention and a one-year cohort experience for single moms to move forward together in a healthy, positive

and encouraging environment. Program participants benefit from case management, credit counseling, goal setting, educational and career planning, access to affordable housing and jobs, and other needed resources.

Johnson has always had a desire to serve others. From the age of 16 when she decided to spend a month in the Dominican Republic and help vaccinate children, to working with the LiveAble: Women program at Able Works, she has dedicated her time to supporting other cultures and giving back to her community.

“When I was in college, I had two academic interests: Spanish and business,” she said. “What I love about Baylor is that it integrates academic excellence with the pursuit of serving God to make a positive impact in the world. I knew pretty early I had a mind for business, but I also had a desire for social justice.”

So Johnson pursued her love of international business. After college, Johnson went to work at Arthur Andersen in Houston. Soon after, she moved with her husband, Scott, to the technology industry in California. She worked in the industry for more than 10 years, as a management consultant with Accenture, then in Latin America business development for Apple.

After working in Mexico City and Sao Paulo, Brazil, for Apple, Johnson and her husband decided to start a family. She left her job to dedicate her time to their two children. While raising her kids, Johnson volunteered in their schools and at church.

“I was on the board of several nonprofits,” Johnson said. “I had so many tools and so much support to raise kids, but not everybody has that. That’s when I started serving under-resourced neighborhoods.”

When her kids were in high school, she began working part-time. First, managing a multi-million dollar capital campaign for her church, then helping manage an educational foundation to raise money for an under-resourced school district.

“I learned a lot about the inequality that exists right here in Silicon Valley,” Johnson said. “I worked from the educational standpoint of trying to improve outcomes. When I looked at the data, I observed a correlation between education level and income level of parents and the educational outcomes of kids. With my business background, I came to a point where I wanted to work on the economic side to see if I could help the adults in the community move forward economically. My theory is it will help the kids advance.”

After her kids graduated from high school, Johnson decided to work full-time with Able Works to help create change in her community.

“Recently, I realized I don’t have to get on an airplane to pursue my professional interests. Culturally sensitive social innovation is required to address complex issues right here in Silicon Valley. At Able Works, we are developing creative solutions every day to address global issues... just five miles from my home.”