

GIVING

CREATING POWERFUL LEADERS ONE GIRL AT A TIME

Science and tech exec Chanterria McGilbra discusses her unique and inspiring nonprofit.



Chanterria McGilbra was considering selling her Ferrari just weeks after making her big purchase, not liking the attention it garnered, until, that is, she was driving in San Francisco and took a detour past Galileo High School. When a girl standing on the side of the road near a stop sign called out, “Ms., I like your car,” McGilbra responded, “Thank you, and I expect you to have one someday.”

It was this moment that prompted McGilbra to keep her Ferrari and use it to inspire young girls. Since that day, her nonprofit Prancing Ponies has not only encouraged girls to pursue leadership positions, but has given them the confidence and skillset they need in order to do so through the organization’s revolutionary leadership training program.

Through its first-of-its-kind fundraising events, the Prancing Ponies All-Female Ferrari Rally and the Prancing Ponies All-Woman Car Show during Monterey Concourse Week, the foundation is able to send 3rd-year engineering students abroad in order to teach them crucial skills to fast track their success in the business world. The lucky first group of young women spent six weeks in Paris last summer.

McGilbra graduated from the International University of Monaco in 2007 before working in Brussels, Belgium, as vice president of Corporate Development for Netmining. She moved on to roles at a biotech startup, Kaiser Permanente, Charles Schwab, and Arthur Andersen. As a woman in executive roles in engineering, technology, and science, McGilbra uses her own leadership experience to educate and empower the next generation of woman leaders. Notes McGilbra, “It’s really important to us not just to talk the talk, but to really build practical skills, from how to run an effective meeting and how to manage time, to how to manage conflict, how to create and give a presentation, and, of course, how to negotiate salaries. After I retired from biotech, I realized that no one was really teaching girls this.”

While travel abroad is important to her organization’s mission, instill-

ing skills and knowledge in the participating young women is greatly needed. “Having access to information in which you are told you are more than enough and more than capable of becoming a leader is critical,” says McGilbra. “Many of us girls don’t hear that enough or at all. We champion the girls in our program, inspiring them to believe in themselves—not just talking about it, but by actually putting them in situations where they are practicing leadership. It’s really something that’s ingrained in them and we give them the opportunity to really put it into practice through the internships.”

Going forward, Prancing Ponies seeks to reach a far broader audience with the introduction of online seminars. “I immediately thought, ‘How can I reach more girls?’ So we put forth the online leadership program. Through our online platform we can reach thousands of girls,” says McGilbra.

Prancing Ponies truly seeks to change the dialogue around being a successful woman in business so that gender is seen as an asset rather than something hindering a woman’s success. “It is important that we honor who we are as women,” stresses McGilbra. “I hear this term ‘Girl Power,’ and for me, it’s so redundant. Of course we’re powerful! We push 10-pound babies out of us. So I would rather hear Girl CEO, Girl Politician, or Girl Leader.”

Through fundraising and outreach efforts, McGilbra has changed the narrative and shown girls their own leadership potential. “One of the reasons we have our fundraisers is because I am again putting out there and showing girls that women are empowered, that women are powerful, and that women do like things

that only men are ‘supposed’ to like, and it shakes up their understanding. So yes, you can have the car and race it, too,” McGilbra notes emphatically. “These girls are now seeing women driving cars that are supposedly masculine, but doing it in a feminine way.” ♦ —GILLIAN BRESSIE

For more information, please visit
www.prancingponies.org.

