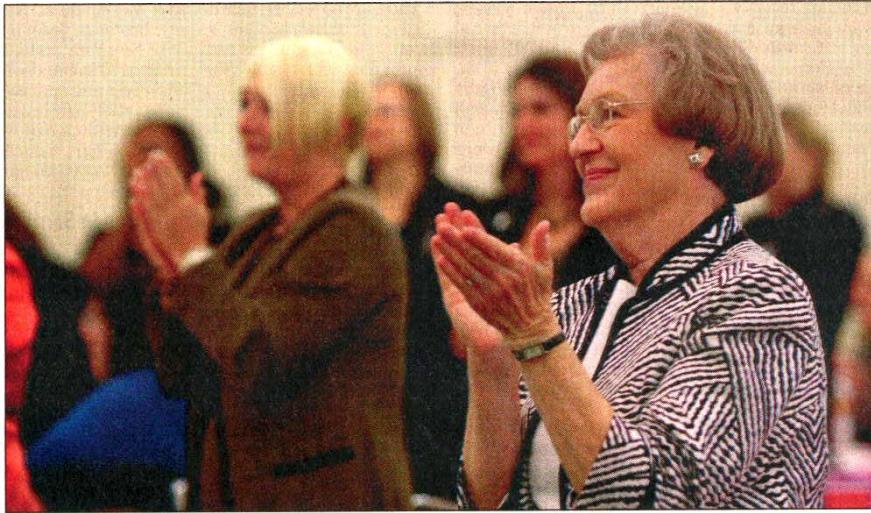


# OTC Women in Business Expo



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Clara Patterson of Killeen applauds during the fifth annual Central Texas Women in Business Expo Wednesday at the Killeen Civic and Conference Center.

## Women in Business Expo inspires

By Jackie Stone

Killeen Daily Herald

Since the first year of the Central Texas Women in Business Expo, emcee Ann Farris has seen the event mature and grow each year along with the crowd that Wednesday included several returnees at the Killeen Civic and Conference Center.

Allen Latham has attended each of the expo's five years, and he was comfortable as the only man in a sea of women. The first year, he came because he was required to attend one diversity event a year as an employee of Walmart in Copperas Cove. Now he comes because he wants to, for both personal and business reasons.

"At Walmart, we learn that 86 percent of the shopping is done by women," he said. "I get a lot of insight here that makes me look at myself and the way I do my job."

The roughly 100 attendees and vendors at the expo this year heard from five speakers, each with a different background and story to tell.

Latham said the talk given by Maj. Ann Marie Laroque, who works with wounded warriors and was herself diagnosed with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome last year, touched a chord with him.

"I've had my own health issues," he said. "Her health and how it affected her outlook, I was always very business-driven, and I've had to learn to take it easy and smell the roses."

Several other Walmart employees attending with Latham said they take the inspirational stories they hear at the expo back to their workplace for themselves

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Herald/CATRINA RAWSON

Maj. Ann Marie Laroque, operations officer, Operational Test Command at Fort Hood, speaks during the fifth annual Central Texas Women in Business Expo Wednesday at the Killeen Civic and Conference Center.

## Expo: Perseverance, positivity

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and to inspire their co-workers.

"To me, the biggest thing you get out of all this is the strength of all these women who continue on despite their obstacles," said Irene Flores, store manager at the Cove Walmart. "And they're so diverse. It's really inspiring."

Laroque said she was surprised to hear in the other speakers' stories, many of the same themes of perseverance, priorities and positivity despite their different backgrounds.

"None of us knew each other before, but we ended up talking about the same things," she said. "We all go through these obstacles, and it's about how you deal with it."

Laroque added, "This is the most women I've been around in 20 years, and it's great to hear all of their stories."

Farris, co-executive director of the Killeen

Food Care Center and a professor at Texas A&M University-Central Texas, has been at the event every year. She kicked off the event in its inaugural year as one of the speakers and has been the emcee since.

"The first year, I was really nervous," she said. "I didn't know exactly what we were doing or how it would work out."

Based on comments from Farris and other members of the audience, the event has become a useful business tool as well as a time to relax, shop and be inspired.

"As women, we're really busy, and I think this applies to men, too. We're generally so focused on other people, and this is a day to refresh and focus on us," Farris said. "You need a day to learn and relax a bit."

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