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Ring in her 100th birthday, Ebby Halliday remains motivated, dedicated

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Ebby Halliday is a Dallas legend and the CEO of Ebby Halliday Realtors.

Ebby Halliday was practically under the knife about to get her tonsils removed in Dallas' old Medical Arts Building when she noticed the nurse handing her doctor information about the stock market.

Having saved \$1,000, which was quite a large amount for a woman in those days, Halliday looked at the doctor and said, "Dr. John—I see you are in the stock market. I would like some advice on where to place my \$1,000 because I want to go into business for myself."

"I don't advise women," he replied. "If they lose, they cry."

Her response: "Well, you try me."

He advised her to go into the cotton business. She took his advice and opened a millenary shop selling hats. She knew she wanted to be an entrepreneur.

That was in 1945.

Today, Halliday is a Dallas legend. As one of its leading businesswomen and as chairman of the board for Ebby Halliday Realtors, she is one of the city's first successful entrepreneurs. With her 100th birthday only a few weeks away, Halliday is also considered one of the Dallas' most respected citizens and philanthropists.

"Always willing to give of her time, finances and resources, Ebby has served our community as a great ambassador of goodwill," Mayor Tom Leppert said.

Halliday will be ringing in her birthday by benefiting The Foundation Fighting Blindness on Feb. 23 at the Hilton Anatole, and the Horatio Alger Association on March 9 at the Meyerson Symphony Center.

For Halliday and those who know her, the story of her success as a woman with a dream was an accomplishment that did not happen overnight.

Early Years

Born in Arkansas and raised in Kansas, Halliday dreamed of being a horseback rider in the circus.

Plans changed in 1938 when Halliday left Kansas City to manage the ladies department in the W.A. Green Department store in Dallas.

It was only two years after the big Texas centennial, and the mayor of Dallas had just declared an end to the depression.

"I stepped off that train and felt the vibration of the energy in the city," Halliday said in a recent interview. "I've always felt that Texas, and Dallas, were the lands of opportunity."

After Halliday's conversation with the doctor, she had saved \$12,000 in less than a year's time and opened a millenary shop selling hats on Fairmont Street.

One afternoon in 1945, a customer approached Halliday while she was at work.

The customer's husband, who is a developer who had recently built single-family homes out of concrete, had one question: "If she could sell all these crazy hats to his wife, could she sell his crazy houses too?"

Halliday said to the woman, "Make me an appointment with your husband."

Using all her savings, Halliday put curtains on the windows, rugs on the concrete floors and attractive furniture in the rooms in order to make the houses appealing to the men coming home from World War II.

"I was essentially staging a home before it was such a thing," Halliday said.

Within nine months, Halliday sold all 52 houses and then opened her first office.

Now, more than 65 years later, Ebby Halliday Realtors has 30 offices and has grown to be one of the largest independently owned residential real estate companies in Texas and the United States, topping more than \$4.8 billion in annual sales.

Personal Life

Halliday graduated from high school in 1929 in Kansas but did not attend college. Instead, she got her first job selling women's hats at The Jones Store in Kansas City.

In 1965, at age 54, Halliday married former FBI agent Maurice Acers. The couple did not have any children before Acers died in 1993. Today, Halliday lives in Preston Hollow and still goes into the office a few times a week.

However, Halliday is more than a realtor. Committed to the community, she devotes a large amount of her time to philanthropy, politics and legislation.

She became the president of the Women's Council of the National Association of Realtors in 1956 and the first woman president of the North Dallas Chamber of Commerce in 1968. Through both of these positions, Halliday helped many women with their careers and stature in real estate.

"When so many doors were shut to women, Ebby just kept knocking," Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison said.

Many perceive Halliday as a mentor and an inspiration in the community. Her close friend, the president and CEO of Ebby Halliday Realtors Mary Frances Burleson, said Halliday encouraged her not to fear, but to "get out there and dream."

Aspiring to give women jobs so they can give their children an education, Halliday was inducted into the Horatio Alger Association in 2005. As a non-profit organization founded in 1947, the Horatio Alger Association strives to motivate young people by awarding need-based scholarships.

"With my involvement in Horatio Alger, I've been able to contribute to the education of many young people," Halliday said.

Affected with the retinal disease macular degeneration, Halliday is also involved with The Foundation Fighting Blindness (FFB) and was inducted as the national trustee of the organization in 2010.

"It's extraordinary what she has done for us in four years," events director for FFB Aaron Rager said. "We have raised over \$1.5 million. We didn't have a presence in Dallas before Ebby."

Halliday still has goals left to achieve on her bucket list.

Besides trying to help accomplish peace in the world, she would like to see the George W. Bush Presidential Center completed in 2013.

The George W. Bush Presidential Center will contain Bush's presidential library, the 13th in the United States and the first of the 21st century, as well as a museum and a policy institute.