

# Feature Interview:

## A Woman of All Seasons

### Talking to Mrs. May Makhzoumi

By; Fatina Salaheddine

May Makhzoumi knows how to multitask. A Lebanese Pharmacist by trade, she has worked in the family business; Future Management/ Future Pipe Industries (A global leader in the large diameter fiberglass pipe industry, developing, manufacturing and supplying pipe systems to a broad range of markets around the world—founded by her husband Mr. Fouad Makhzoumi), since 1982 which has taught her a lot, in dealing with public needs through her HR, accounting, legal issues, PR, and project writing experiences. Along with all the challenges of her day-to-day career, and being a board member on a plethora of business, philanthropic, civil and human rights organizations throughout the world, May has been her husband's number 1 supporter and confidant, and has raised 3 children, all now successful in their own rights, and devotedly states she “loves and adores her family and grandchildren”.

Being a huge supporter of women and women's rights in Lebanon, May Makhzoumi believes that women's involvement in the world of business is an opportunity for them to better understand the issues that matter to their society and to the world in general. Mrs. Makhzoumi states that it has been a privilege to have been involved in all aspects of her husband's global business and philanthropic activities, from their inception. Amongst all,



the Makhzoumi Foundation has been the greatest and the most rewarding of all the challenges she has faced. The Foundation was established, in Lebanon in 1997, out of a strong desire to help enable fellow citizens achieve self-dependence and improved career prospects. It has been growing ever since.

**The Makhzoumi Foundation's vision may be summarized as follows:**

- Evolution of the Lebanese civil society.
- Empowerment of the potentials of Lebanese human resources.
- Empowerment of the Lebanese citizens to reach self-responsibility and independence.
- Emphasizing the importance of environmental preservation.
- Encouraging the quest for education.

**To achieve this, the Makhzoumi Foundation has organized six programs:**

- Civic Vocational Training Centers
- Agriculture & Environment
- Micro-Credit
- Awareness
- Health Care Program
- Lebanon Innovation Award

The Foundation's activities cover all of Lebanon, with 38% of its beneficiaries coming from the capital, Beirut, and the remainder from the rest of the country.

Since its outset, the Makhzoumi Foundation's Training Centers Program has awarded tens of thousands certificates, and its Health Program has benefited, tens of thousands families. The Micro Credit Program has extended thousands of loans to Lebanese borrowers. The Agriculture & Awareness Programs are directed at women, children and farmers and has benefited thousands of Lebanese citizens as well.

The Foundation has been the first NGO in Lebanon to be awarded ISO 9001:2000 certification, and to carry the Microsoft logo on its computer certificates.

I recently caught up with Mrs. May Makhzoumi, in between her busy travel schedule, to discuss her career and dedication for the Makhzoumi foundation, her activism, and strong leadership in Lebanon.



Hello & Welcome Mrs. Makhzoumi,

- You are the President of the Makhzoumi Foundation. How do you view yourself or liked to be perceived as? (A businesswoman, philanthropist, leader for social causes and women alike, or all of the above). Please elaborate.

**Actually, I am before anything else a philanthropist, even if the Foundation is managed like any business should. We even acquired ISO 9001:2000 for quality management, The Foundation has been a pioneer, since its founding in 1997, in reaching out to the Lebanese people and working with them to make a change in the lives of children, adolescent and adults from both genders, but mostly women.**

**Accordingly, I carry on my work professionally aiming for excellence in the Foundation's performance, by keeping up-to-date and carrying-out regular market research to identify what are the local social needs, to be able to tailor the Foundations offerings accordingly.**

- When you first started running the Foundation – what was the main social “need” that the foundation felt prevalent in Lebanese society. And how did the Foundation then grow?

**We established the Foundation after 15 years of civil war, there**



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were projects for building the country, but little attention was given to the human capacity building. IT and computer knowledge, both were well under way in the advanced world, but in Lebanon, very few people had access to computers or the means to learn about it. We knew it was the future, so we opted to start with training centers to teach Computers and English Language and later vocational training. Our aim was to empower the people with skills that will help them move fast forward in their work.

After that, we recruited a Microcredit Expert from the US and worked with him for over 6 months to map the capital, Beirut, for the social need and train a program Manager and Credit promoters to work in urban areas rather than in rural areas. At the same time, we directed our attention to agriculture and environment preservation through an Agriculture Program which directed its attention to farmers...In parallel, we started an Awareness program that targeted children and women largely and the population generally with issues related to civic rights, health, craft, etc....

Few years later we developed the Health Program, which was a network of doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and laboratories to provide good health care at minimum cost. With time we established our own clinics that provide health and dentistry services.

I find your Motto underneath your Makhzoumi Foundation logo interesting: Together we began & united forever we shall stand. Can you please elaborate on this message – and its significant

meaning to Lebanese society?

As a matter of fact, our first Logo was “Lebanon Together Again”. This meant that we are talking to each other and not fighting each other. After few years down the lane, we felt we need to have a slogan that is more universal and not representing a specific situation. So the above slogan reflects our case by telling the beneficiaries and the employees alike, that together we started this venture, with you we succeed and for your sake we continue..... Giving the hope that we are here to stay.....

You are a pharmacist by profession – how does your medical background impact your position with the Makhzoumi Foundation? Does it impact any particular program at the Foundation?

Well with my medical program, I have an affinity to the Awareness Program and, of course the Health Program... I believe my input gives a different dimension when dealing with certain issues.

I understand that the following points are objectives of the foundation:

- Evolution of the Lebanese Civil Society
- Encouraging the quest of Education
- Enhancement of the Potentials of Lebanese Human Resources
- Enforcement of Self-responsibility & independence
- Emphasizing the importance of Environment Preservation
- Encompassing Good Health Care



– With all these being said, how does Lebanon as a country fall in world civil society rankings?

In the 2009 UNDP report, Lebanon was graded as “medium” in human development, in the Arab world. Accordingly, there is a lot of room for advancement growth and improvement.

Can you describe some of the programs that make the Makhzoumi Foundation so unique and vital to Lebanese society? Which programs are you most proud of? Which programs are most challenging?

What makes us unique is the diversity of our programs. We are not specialized in one social service only. We have 5 programs; each is performing a specific job with specific goals and targets. Yet, all

these programs are interacting in one way or the other. Accordingly we have a wide base of beneficiaries from all ages, both genders and from all over the country. So, we have national non sectarian offerings that benefit all Lebanese citizens. We plan our activities strategically for the maximum benefit and empowerment to the people.

To tell you the truth, I am proud of all the programs and what we have achieved so far, as each program is a challenge in its own right.

Does one have to meet a certain criteria in order to receive aid or benefit from the many programs at the Foundation?

The only requirement is for the beneficiary  
*May Makhzoumi, cont'd on page 14*



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May Makhzoumi, cont'd from page 13

**ciary should be holder of a Lebanese nationality and should have a low income status.**

- What sort of team comprises the faculty at the Foundation? (Biased as a Businesswoman myself – but what's the percentage of Lady Faculty vs. Men?)

**Just to reassure you 85 % of our staff are women, all in senior positions. The team is based on DGM, Program Managers and assistances, Head of centers, secretaries, instructors, doctors, nurses, technicians, accountants, Microcredit promoters, IT department, genitors and, last but not least, volunteers.**

- What personally gratifies you the most at the Makhzoumi Foundation?

**Many things gives me satisfaction, but mostly meeting beneficiaries in Lebanon & outside Lebanon, who say that it is thanks to the courses they took at the Foundation, that they found better chances in life. I am also thrilled when I see a Micro Credit beneficiary receive an award, because of his/her innovative business and success.**



- Can you tell us a story or incident from a member benefitting from the Makhzoumi Foundation that really touched your heart?

**Last year we had one of our beneficiaries win the Sanabel,(Microcredit Arab Net work), yearly prize from Lebanon. Being a widow and having suffered badly from being on her own, and with no help, she managed to stand on her feet, develop a business, teach her children and take care of her family, starting with one loan and carrying on with more loans, after paying off, to grow her business.. Knowing that without our initial help, she could not have made it.**

- Lebanese civil society has a long way to go. What drives you at the Foundation? With all the enormous obligations, tasks and difficult Lebanese social issues at hand – what keeps you optimistic and leading the Makhzoumi Foundation for so many years?

**I guess it's the ups and downs, the disappointments; the frustrations, the uncertainty, the fear of operating in a country with a volatile stability, could lead you to give up. But when you know that so many people are benefiting, when you know that there is need for every help you can give, when you know there is always hope, this gives you the energy and the stamina to continue defeating and challenging all obstacles that may arise.**

- What do you tell the young Lebanese generation, as advice in their citizen obligations to give back to their country?

**Every citizen has rights and duties. Life is not only taking, it is giving too. It is sharing, whether knowledge, wealth, responsibility, care etc. We have a country called Lebanon, a gift that God bestowed upon us, it is our duty and obligation to preserve it, not for us only but for all the generations that will come after us..... It is a unique country by all means and we need to keep it alive!!!**

- How can our American & Arab readership, reading about the Makhzoumi Foundation help or connect in any way?

**The best way is to visit our website:**

[www.makhzoumi-foundation.org](http://www.makhzoumi-foundation.org)

**Be a fan on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, watch our latest videos on U-tube and chat with us on our Blog!!!**

- Would you like to add a final remark or comment?

**I would like to see more openness from the American people to our part of the world. I would like to see more understanding of our culture and our people, after all we are all human beings living on this earth, so we better share with more love and care for the human race....**

**\*Thank you for your time and consideration Mrs. Makhzoumi.**

