To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of Teresa Adams-Tomka.  I have known Teresa both personally and professionally for over twenty years.  We opened Kitchen Collage of Des Moines together in 1999 and were partners for sixteen years until I relocated to Florida.

When we opened Kitchen Collage, Teresa had been busy raising her five children and working part time in clothing retail.  Our decision to open the store while her kids were elementary to high school age was very ambitious but she was ready to take her years of child rearing and retail experience to the next level.  The first years were crazy and exhausting, but Teresa’s positive attitude and perseverance kept us going.

I was fairly new to Des Moines, but Teresa’s involvement in her kid’s schools, sports, volunteering and retail job helped build our original clientele base.  Many of those who started with us back in 1999, are still loyal to Kitchen Collage today. Teresa always made everyone feel at home in our store. Friends were invited to come to the store for coffee and freshly made scones.  Our new customers were not strangers, just new friends to be made.

These same practices are still used by Teresa today.  The store has moved, the inventory has changed but Teresa’s same principles to be hospitable and open to all has never changed.  Her infectious laugh and inviting nature is why Kitchen Collage continues to be a store where all feel welcomed and want to spend time.

It has been exciting to watch Teresa evolve as a business owner.  Our field is still fairly male dominated and that never stopped Teresa from insisting that our store was worthy of the same time and attention as a big chain store. This led to personal invitations to travel to Europe to tour factories such as Wusthof, Le Cruset, and Emile Henry as a small business owner.  These companies valued Teresa’s thoughts and opinions and they loved her down to earth, midwest personality. In fact the owner of Emile Henry, Jacques Henry made a special trip to Des Moines to see Kitchen Collage. Knowing he was an avid cyclist like herself, Teresa took him on a biking tour through Des Moines.

Tragically, eleven years ago Teresa and her children suffered a great loss when her dear husband Jim passed away. Teresa took her pain and turned it into something positive. She kept Jim’s memory alive by adding philanthropic activist to her repertoire.  Teresa is still incredibly busy running Kitchen Collage, but makes it a priority to support many local charity events, teach cooking classes for youth at risk, attend spin classes for cancer survivors and climb mountains all over the world with *Above And Beyond Cancer.*

Teresa Adams-Tomka is a born giver.  From raising her five amazing children, building a retail business from the ground up, to all her charity work in the community, she continues to amaze and inspire not only myself but those who are blessed to encounter her.  I am sure there will be many incredible women being nominated for this great honor, but I truly believe because of the reasons I mentioned, Teresa is the top nominee for this award.

Sincerely,

Molly L. Eliason