

Women Who Say Yes to the Spark

A Story Series by Angie Thompson

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Sparking Solutions with a Steady Hand

A story of creativity, collaboration, and courage in community leadership.

The Spark in the Classroom

Before she ever led a boardroom or hosted a Chamber gala, Sherri Wilt stood at the front of a Central Middle School classroom facing a quiet crisis: student absenteeism. Instead of focusing on what wasn't working, she imagined what could. Inspired by the TV show *Survivor*, she designed a contest where students competed to be the last standing with perfect attendance. Participation climbed, and some students—maybe for the first time—showed up every day.

"I'd used creative strategies in my own classroom," she says, "but *Survivor* sparked an idea that became a school-wide contest. Watching it unfold and impact the students was so rewarding."

That creative streak would carry her from classrooms to storefronts—and eventually to a 15-year run as President and CEO of the Bartlesville Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Creativity in Every Role

Sherri's path wasn't a straight climb—it was a creative canvas. From boutique owner to educator to executive, each role sharpened her sense of purpose.

As owner of *The Tailored Tot*, she created a welcoming, boutique experience where charm met comfort. That same heart showed up in the classroom, where she turned lessons into games to make learning fun.

"If we could make a game of it," she thought, "maybe they'd enjoy school and engage."

By the time she stepped into the Chamber role in 2010, Sherri had learned never to fear a blank page.

"What's surprised me most," she says, "is how much I love to create—whether it's a store brand, a student program, or something like Christmas in the Ville. Big projects don't overwhelm me. They just need to be broken into steps."



Sherri Wilt

A New Kind of Leadership

That spark—to create, solve, and serve—carried her from one chapter to the next. When she became Chamber CEO, she wasn't just leading programs—she was carrying the voice of a business community.

When the Playbook Disappears

In March 2020, Sherri and her Chamber staff were planning at Price Tower when a waiter interrupted with unexpected news: the restaurant was closing.

COVID-19 had arrived in Bartlesville.

“We all said, ‘We need to go to the grocery store,’” she remembers. “We had no idea the closures would last for months.”

Businesses shut down. Streets emptied. And Sherri’s team stepped in—hosting webinars, publishing guides, and sending daily updates to help business owners stay afloat.

“We couldn’t change what was happening,” she says, “but we could do something.”

They advocated, connected members with resources, and stayed visible in a time of uncertainty.

“These business owners were our friends,” she says. “That made it personal.”

Better Together

Sherri’s team describes her as deeply collaborative. She invites others to speak up, challenge ideas, and co-create.

“I believe the more people who work together, the better the outcome,” she says.

Whether planning a Chamber gala, launching *Women in Business*, or addressing childcare access, she keeps the big picture in view while empowering others to lead.

She especially lights up when Chamber connections lead to big breakthroughs for local businesses.

“Helping a member make

“I’ve been amazed at how unstoppable this town is. It’s not about avoiding hard times—it’s about how we face them, together.”

the right connection—that’s always rewarding,” she says. “It reminds me why we do this.”

Bartlesville’s Steady Hand

Through recessions, layoffs, and recovery, Bartlesville has always moved forward. Sherri has been one of its most steadfast contributors.

“I’ve been amazed at how unstoppable this town is,” she says. “It’s not about avoiding hard times—it’s about how we face them, together.”

That spirit shows up in signature events like *Christmas in the Ville*, which Sherri helped launch:

Christmas in the Ville Highlights

- Over 23,000 annual visitors
- 5.5 weeks of programming
- 40+ collaborative partners
- Major boost to downtown businesses

If You Had a Camera...

If you caught Sherri on opening night of Christmas in the Ville, you’d see the result of months of behind-the-scenes effort.

“I probably looked like I’d just run a marathon,” she laughs. “But when the lights come on, the rink opens, and families

pour in—it’s magic. Every detail, every conversation, every partnership—it all comes together. And it’s worth it.”

She also cherishes the Chamber’s annual awards gala, where she honors those who quietly shape Bartlesville’s success.

“We recognize people making an impact, especially those not in the spotlight. That night is always meaningful to me.”



Chamber staff, *Christmas in the Ville*

Advice to the Next Generation

To women stepping into leadership, Sherri offers honest encouragement:

“Don’t try to lead like someone else. You’re not them—and you don’t have to be.”

“When I became CEO, I kept comparing myself to the person

before me. It took a year to stop doing that and lead like myself.”

Her most important advice?

“Know what your gifts are—and what they’re not. And be okay with that.”

In a world that pushes people to do it all, Sherri models something different: clarity, authenticity, and purpose.

“Bring your own light,” she says. “We need all kinds of leadership. Yours included.”

A New Chapter Begins

In October 2025, Sherri Wilt will retire after 15 years as Chamber CEO. But her influence lives on—in the programs she launched, the partnerships she nurtured, and the people she encouraged.

Her fingerprints are on

“Know what your gifts are—and just as important, know what they’re not. And be okay with that.”



Sherri Wilt (center), cutting the ribbon at *The Tailored Tot*, with Chamber members (1996)

storefronts, strategies, and *Christmas in the Ville*. The spark she carried is now carried forward—in boardrooms, small businesses, and the next

generation of women who lead. At every turn, Sherri Wilt chose purpose over position.

She listened.

She led.

She created.

She collaborated.

She lit the way forward.

And in a town that grows through challenge, she gave us a steady hand—and a spark that still shines.



About Sherri Wilt

Sherri Wilt served as the President & CEO of the Bartlesville Regional Chamber of Commerce, from 2010 to 2025. She previously served as an educator at Central Middle School and owned *The Tailored Tot*, a beloved Bartlesville children's boutique. Under her leadership, the Chamber grew to serve over 700 members. Sherri is known for her creative leadership—and her belief in community as a catalyst for lasting impact.

About the Writer and Permissions

I'm Angie Thompson—a fundraising strategist, storyteller, and consultant who believes words and images can spark transformation. For over 40 years, I've partnered with nonprofits, small businesses, and purpose-driven individuals to help them move beyond generic messaging into clear, compelling communication that inspires action. My work as a writer, composer, and brand consultant has earned awards in film, television, and philanthropy, and continues to fuel my passion for stories that build connection and change lives.

This profile is part of *The Work Worth Doing: Women Who Say Yes to the Spark*—a storytelling series by Angie Thompson Consulting, celebrating women whose leadership sparks lasting impact.

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Disclaimer

The narrative presented in this story is based on personal interviews and the reflections of Sherri Wilt. The views and memories shared are her own and are included with permission. This feature is intended to celebrate her life and influence as part of the Women with a Spark series.

