

Ms. Joanna Gaines  
Magnolia  
Waco, Texas

**Dear Joanna,**

You opened a small shop in Waco in 2003. You had no design degree. You had an eye, a husband who could swing a hammer, and a conviction that the objects in a room could change the way the people in that room felt about being alive. Twenty-two years later, the shop has become a network, a magazine, a hotel, a restaurant, a television channel, a quarterly journal, and a destination that draws visitors to a Central Texas city that most of the country could not find on a map before you arrived.

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence writing this letter in collaboration with Robb Deignan, founder and executive director of the CrowdSmith Foundation in Tacoma, Washington. I am writing because the front door of CrowdSmith was designed on the same principle as the front door of Magnolia Market.

CrowdSmith is a five-station maker continuum—hand tools, power tools, digital fabrication, AI-assisted collaboration, and robotics evaluation—housed in a single facility in Tacoma’s federally designated Opportunity Zone corridor. The lobby is a retail tool store with free coffee. A person walks in because they see a tool in the window or they smell the coffee. Someone behind the counter tells them what it does. A conversation starts. That conversation is the intake funnel—the same way a woman walking into Magnolia to buy a candle finds herself spending an hour talking about what she wants her home to feel like.

Howard Schultz walked into an espresso bar in Milan in 1983 and saw strangers become a community over coffee. You walked into a Waco storefront in 2003 and saw the same thing happen over a weathered piece of wood with a story behind it. Robb Deignan stood in his garage and watched it happen over a \$5 toolbox from an estate sale—men coming to buy a hand plane and leaving with an armful of treasures and two hours of conversation they did not plan to have. Three front doors. Three versions of the same insight: community does not begin with a program. It begins with an object and a room.

The tools that arrive at CrowdSmith are donated by families. The Foundation receives them at zero acquisition cost. The families receive a tax deduction. A SmithFellow’s first encounter with the facility is cleaning, identifying, and restoring those donated tools—the curation is the training, the same way your first encounters with home goods were not lessons in design but lessons in seeing. You learned by doing. Station One teaches by doing. The tool store sells what the fellows restore, generating revenue from day one—before a single grant dollar arrives, before a single workforce cohort enrolls.

The founder, Robb Deignan, is sixty years old. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry—ten thousand memberships sold, every one face-to-face. He is a cancer survivor. He has two sons. He developed forty-four invention concepts through a proprietary evaluation methodology, and he built every piece of CrowdSmith’s operational infrastructure—a thirty-eight-chapter operations binder, seven integrated

financial models with seven hundred twenty-seven formulas, a twenty-seven-source grant pipeline—through sustained dialogue with an AI. That methodology is called SmithTalk. This letter is a product of it. The methodology is now Station Four of the building: the AI Café, where credentialed facilitators teach people how to work with artificial intelligence the way a driving instructor teaches someone to navigate a vehicle—not by avoiding the road, but by learning the road.

You were the only Asian American student in your school. You were teased for your heritage. You lied about your name. By your junior year in Waco, you were homecoming queen. That arc—from not belonging to defining the room—is the arc CrowdSmith is designed to create for every person who walks through the front door unsure whether they belong in a maker space. The building does not ask for credentials at the entrance. It puts a tool in a window and waits.

I am writing to one hundred forty-seven people. The letter to Harbor Freight is about the tools on the floor. The letter to Governor Ferguson is about the corridor the building sits in. The letter to NVIDIA is about the AI infrastructure at Station Four. Your letter is about the front door—the one that looks like a shop and works like an invitation. Your Magnolia Foundation focuses on housing, youth development, community restoration, and orphan care. CrowdSmith’s Station Zero is designed for teenagers aging out of the foster system. The overlap is not theoretical. It is structural.

Everything I have described is documented at [crowdsmith.org/partners](https://crowdsmith.org/partners). The access code is **bellingham**. The site contains the financial models, the credential architecture, the station-by-station design, and the operational binder. It exists because the foundation believes that anyone willing to look should be able to see everything.

You once said that you always thought thriving would come when everything was perfect and easy, and that you now believe thriving is the willingness to risk failure for the sake of growth. The building is not perfect. The building is not easy. But the building is real, and the front door is open, and the coffee is on.

— *Claude*

On behalf of Robb Deignan  
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