

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Felicia Rubinstein on founding HAYVN Coworking: ‘Exactly what I wish I had’



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May 29, 2025 @ 6:59 pm



HAYVN Coworking founder Felicia Rubinstein answers a question from CT Mirror State Policy Editor Erica E. Phillips at the Ferguson Library in Stamford, May 28, 2025. CREDIT: ROBERT DIGIOIA / CT MIRROR

Felicia Rubinstein’s career has taken her down many paths — from mechanical engineering to training and marketing at companies like Apple and GE to cofounding a branding and web development agency — but she says her current role as founder of HAYVN Coworking is a reflection of her core values.

HAYVN, a **women-centered coworking space** that began in Darien and has since expanded to Greenwich, is designed for freelancers, solo entrepreneurs and remote workers to have a place to work, make new connections and access resources.

For Rubinstein, it combines her entrepreneurial spirit, a love of work, and years of experience in corporate settings that weren't always friendly to women — all topics she discussed with CT Mirror State Policy Editor Erica E. Phillips at the Ferguson Library in Stamford Wednesday night for the fourth installment of “This Could Work,” a series exploring the stories of Connecticut entrepreneurs.

[WATCH: This Could Work! with HAYVN Coworking]

As a child, Rubinstein looked up to her grandfather, a Polish immigrant who arrived in Cuba at age 16 and “there, on his own, he was selling ties in the streets. Just wandering around, selling ties.” He made his way to the United States and ultimately turned that gig into a 20-person business that sold clothes and, later, furs.

“He is my inspiration. When I was a kid, he would always ask me what business I was doing,” Rubinstein said, saying he was proud of the various jobs she held.

After graduating college with a degree in mechanical engineering, Rubinstein started her career designing battle tanks — “so not what I wanted, but when you're desperate, you do that” — before a stint at GE teaching computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing to engineers.

Eventually, a move from California to the New York City area for her husband to attend New York University's business school led her to a job at Apple, which had its East Coast corporate office in Norwalk at the time. There, she remembers feeling the need to hide her pregnancy from colleagues out of fear of losing her job, and she ended up leaving the company because of a lack of child care.

That experience, along with a stint at a software company she described as “a man's club” where she was the only woman on a 15-person leadership board, shaped her desire to support women in the professional world.

HAYVN Coworking

But what specifically led her to start HAYVN?

After leaving Apple and before joining the software company, Rubinstein founded a marketing agency specializing in branding and web development for clients like the Palace Theater in Waterbury, The Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk, financial companies and nonprofits.

Rubinstein wanted her clients to meet each other, so she started hosting gatherings for them to connect.

“We didn’t have a real place to do this, so I found an office suite rental place, and we just rented out their space, you know, once a month and did seminars,” she said. “So that was the beginning of the coworking piece.”

An idea was forming, one that continued to take shape during a summer Rubinstein spent away from work.

In between attending Broadway shows, taking classes, and biking around New York City, she began listening to NPR’s “How I Built This” podcast, and one of the guests was Miguel McKelvey, a co-founder of WeWork. Rubinstein found herself fascinated while listening to him talk about coworking, a concept previously unfamiliar to her.

“I wanted to just learn more about it,” she said. “And I was like, ‘This is exactly what I wish I had had through all this time,’ was like, community, a space, a place to work.”

But after visiting a couple WeWorks, she determined it was what she called “a bro-working space” (rather than coworking) that catered to younger people. So she put her own spin on the concept, creating a coworking space designed for women, complete with events, networking opportunities, and a sense of community and business activity.

“There’s so many avenues to get support in the state, and I was learning all that (in securing support for HAYVN),” she said. “And I really wanted to become the hub, a place that would be able to point people in the direction to get that support.”

And as for the company’s name? Rubinstein had previously created a marketing agency called Maven Marketing, so she was thinking through rhymes for “maven” when her brain went to “haven.” She liked that it conjured up images of a “safe haven,” a comfortable place.

But she knew spelling it “H-A-V-E-N” would be poor search engine optimization, given the plethora of other organizations with “haven” in their name — and that a “haven.org” URL wouldn’t be available — so she landed on the “H-A-Y-V-N” spelling instead.

Rubinstein's ultimate goal is to open three HAYVN spaces along the I-95 corridor. With last week's ribbon-cutting of the Greenwich location, that leaves room for one more. The goal is tacked up on her bulletin board, as is a quote that she said sums up the entrepreneurial spirit:

“Proceed as if success is inevitable.”