

WOMENomics:

By Marielena Zuniga

Despite being the hardest hit by the economic melt-down, women offer strength to rebuild the global economy.



solving the economic crisis

/wim'in • om'iks/

Noun

1. Investing in women as the solution to the economic crisis.
2. Relying on the strength of women to ensure growth of the global economy.

In the still, lonely hours before dawn, a woman sits at the kitchen table, her face creased with worry. She is in her 30s, college educated and a single mother of two. A job layoff last year forced her to dig into her savings to survive. Finally, she landed another job, at much less pay. Then she was laid off. Again.

Now, her savings exhausted, she is living on credit cards. She takes whatever temporary jobs she can, but the meager pay doesn't cover the cost of gas to get there. Some days, she forgets to eat. She has trouble sleeping. She looks out at the blue-black sky, her heart pounding, her stomach churning, as questions race through her mind. How will she make her mortgage payments? Feed her children? How can she go on? How did it ever come to this?

This woman is not alone. Like so many others, she is struggling to survive tough economic times. And while the financial freefall is impacting males and females alike, the sad fact is that in this global economic meltdown, women are being hardest hit.

The reasons? For one, women have always had fewer financial resources than men. Today, U.S. women working full time earn an estimated 80 cents for every dollar made by a man. And although women make up nearly half the workforce, they hold the vast majority of minimum- and below-minimum wage jobs. Women also hold more part-time jobs due to family and caregiving responsibilities. Because they work part-time, are in and out of the workforce, and subject to the gender wage gap—many women enter their older years with fewer personal savings than men.

Some argue, however, that this is a “he-session,” a new term to describe an economic downturn where men are disproportionately impacted by unemployment. Initially, men were experiencing the brunt of the financial downturn, with traditionally male-dominated jobs in construction and manufacturing the first to be hit.

But women, unfortunately, are catching up. As the recession worsened in the U.S. in the fall of 2008 and spread to the female-dominated service and retail sectors,

the unemployment rate for women has risen faster than men's for several months, according to the DC-based National Women's Law Center (NWLC: www.nwlc.org). Many women, who had been secondary wage earners in their households, are now emerging as the de facto breadwinners, often struggling to support their families on low-paying salaries.

“It would be wrong to ignore the fact that both men and women are losing jobs at a frightening rate,” says Joan Entmacher, vice president and director of family economic security of the NWLC. “Loss of either job is a serious problem, but as this recession gets worse, women are increasingly losing their jobs, too.”

Unemployment among women who head families is higher than for men generally and hits a vulnerable group, Entmacher adds. “If they were not living in poverty before the recession, they were not very far above it. There are few or no savings built in and where there is disruption in the income of the sole breadwinner ... they fall off a cliff and things can fall apart very, very rapidly.”

Bearing the brunt of the economic crisis are the 27 million women and children in the U.S. living in poverty. Single mothers and children are far more likely to be impoverished than any other demographic group, says Sara K. Gould, president and chief executive officer of the Ms. Foundation for Women (ms.foundation.org) in Brooklyn, New York. “So, while it's true the recession is impacting both men and women,” she says, “women are more vulnerable in the paid labor market, their wages are lower than men, they have higher rates of poverty and they're more likely to be supporting a family on their own.”

Globally, the situation isn't much better. The economic crisis is expected to plunge 22 million women into unemployment and make decent work for women difficult to find in 2009, according to a report by the International Labour Office (ILO) in Geneva.

“Gender inequality in the workplace has long been with us, but it is likely to be exacerbated by the crisis,” says ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. “In times of economic

Recovery and Reinvestment Act and Shriver Report Benefit Women

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act benefits women and children in many ways, especially in two areas—child care and education. The Act includes \$2 billion in additional funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, enabling working parents to afford the child care they need, reducing parents' financial burdens during the economic recession and providing more children with safe, early learning experiences.

“It will also create or save jobs for child care providers—who are primarily women—and help them keep their programs in business,” says Marcia Greenberger, co-president of the National Women’s Law Center (NWLCC) <nwlc.org> in Washington, DC.

The Act also includes essential funding for education and job training. “The ability to afford college is important for everyone,” Greenberger says, “but it’s not until the average woman has some college education that she is able to earn more than the average man who lacks a high school diploma.”

While the Act includes measures important to women and families, a new project by California’s First Lady Maria Shriver aims to help women as well. Teaming with the Center for American Progress, among others, Shriver is developing a report titled “A Woman’s Nation,” exploring the current condition of U.S. women with a particular emphasis on the economic downturn’s impact. The multi-year, action-oriented project will focus on capturing an accurate and up-to-date portrait of the American woman and developing next steps to remove barriers to her success.

“For the first time in our nation’s history, women now represent half of all workers and are becoming the primary breadwinners in more families than ever before,” Shriver wrote in an editorial. “These two facts have far reaching consequences to government, business, faith communities, women and even men. Clearly, this country is now what I like to call, a ‘Women’s Nation.’”—M.Z.

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upheaval, women often experience the negative consequences more rapidly and are slower to enjoy the benefits of recovery.”

The economic downturn’s impact on women is not limited to jobs and wages. The housing crisis is an important factor as well. In the U.S., women hold a disproportionate share of subprime mortgages (mortgages provided to borrowers perceived as risky or unreliable), according to a report by the Consumer Federation of America.

That study cited women’s lower wealth and income, historical barriers to credit, and predatory lending practices as possible reasons women were likely to receive subprime mortgages.

These higher mortgage rates often force women to make impossible choices between feeding their families, paying their health care costs, or keeping their homes. In an extreme case, a 52-year-old wife and mother from Massachusetts shot herself because she was unable to keep up with ever-increasing monthly payments on her home. Facing foreclosure, she faxed a letter to her mortgage company, reading, in part: “By the time you foreclose on my home, I’ll be dead.” As people gathered outside for the auction, she was dead inside her home.

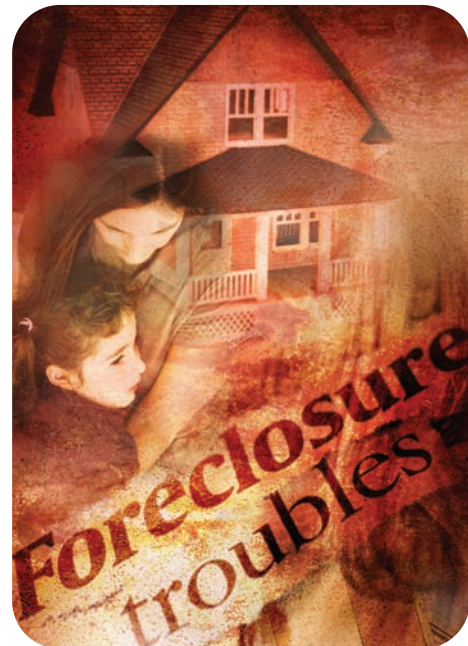
Domestic violence is also on the rise. A survey by Mary Kay, Inc., a member of the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, found that in the U.S., three out of four domestic violence shelters report an increase in women seeking assistance from abuse since September 2008, a major turning point in the U.S. economy. The survey data directly connects an increase in domestic violence to the economy’s downturn.

“When unemployment rises, there’s an uptick in violence against women in almost every part of the world,” agrees Kavita Ramdas, president and chief executive officer of the California-based Global Fund for Women <Globalfundforwomen.org>.

Around the world

Because many women in the developing world already live in poverty, they are suffering more—on many levels—than their counterparts in advanced economies. The poorer the family, the more important the woman’s earnings are to the family’s subsistence, children’s health and education. So, a small pay cut or job loss can severely damage them and their dependents. In some countries, gender discrimination leads to women being fired first, with men seen as the breadwinners when jobs are scarce. During Asia’s financial collapse of the 1990s, for instance, South Korea laid off women at 10 times the rate of men.

Media and governments often lack gender perspective and analysis about the economic crisis in their coverage, Ramdas says. “And given the huge amount of data prepared by everybody from the U.N. to the World Bank where women are the poorest of the poor, you would imagine it would be self-evident that this crisis is disproportionately affecting women and their families.”



Case in point: When a factory in El Salvador closed, 1,700 people—mostly women—were left without a means to survive. “Many women were pregnant, ill and left with nothing,” one woman shared in an Oxfam report. “It’s been three months since the factory closed and we haven’t been paid anything, no severance, no social fund payments.”

Financial insecurity also forces women to be on the move, looking for new jobs and economic opportunities, Ramdas says. “This migration puts women at risk for violence and makes them vulnerable to human trafficking.”

Domino effect

The effects of the financial crisis have far-reaching consequences, affecting every aspect of life for women and their families. For one, it is impacting girls’ education in developing nations, with girls often the first to be taken out of school and put to work. “With limited monies, families will privilege boys over girls as to who goes to school,” says Ramdas, “and we’re seeing a trend with more and more girls pulled out of schools because parents don’t feel financially capable of keeping both boys and girls in school.”

Investing in girls, however, is precisely the catalyst poor countries need to ultimately overcome poverty and the economic crisis, say experts. A United Nations report stated that female education “has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth ... educated women have more economic opportunities and engage more fully in public life.”

Health experts also fear that increasing unemployment worldwide coupled with poverty will lead to less food security and quality of nutrition. This in turn will put stress on already weakened health and immune systems, according to a report by the World Bank. As poor households switch to cheaper and often less nutritional foods, women and children may begin to suffer poor health.

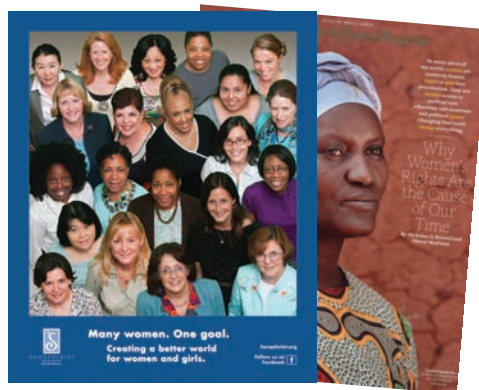
The financial crisis also affects the ability of women in the developing world to do

business to survive. Many depend on microcredit programs to fund their small businesses, sometimes as simple as selling fruit from a sidewalk push cart. But companies that provide microcredit or small loans are at risk for losing some of their funding, which could have devastating effects for these women who need those monies to survive.

“Microcredit programs in many parts of the developing world have been the last safety net [for women] who didn’t have any other options,” Ramdas says, “and if that safety net is being pulled out from under their feet, they are facing a much higher set of challenges in ... making their businesses succeed.”

While women in the United States don’t face those same challenges, they do face structural barriers in owning and operating small businesses, an area that needs to be opened to women, Gould adds. “In the United States, 25 percent of small businesses are owned by women,” she says, “but it’s a place we’ve been kept out of. It wasn’t so long ago that a woman couldn’t take out a loan in her own name. For the economy’s sake, however, it makes good business sense and good development sense to encourage women to build their businesses.”

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Soroptimist was proud to have an ad featured in a special women’s empowerment issue of *The New York Times Magazine*, which discussed the importance of investing in women as a way to help solve many of the world’s economic and social problems.

Taking Action

Clubs can help local unemployed women by hosting networking events that allow them to interact and make possible employment connections. Clubs can also hold workshops to help women prepare for job interviews, and offer interviewing tips and resume critiquing.

As the job market tightens and unemployment numbers continue to rise, volunteering with organizations like Soroptimist can help hone skills and fill resume gaps. Volunteers have the chance to gain skills that are relevant, not only in the volunteer world, but the in workplace as well. Soroptimists have many opportunities to develop and refine various leadership skills such as public speaking, project management and problem-solving. Taking on commitments such as these shows prospective employers that candidates used time without a job to cultivate new skills and experience.

For the millions of women struggling to make ends meet, financial demands can be overwhelming. By participating in the Soroptimist Women’s Opportunity Awards program, clubs can help women improve their employment status and create better lives for themselves and their families.

Investing in women is key to solving the economic crisis. Clubs can apply for Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls and start their own local projects that equip women with the skills they need to start businesses and generate income. Establishing microcredit lending programs for women can stimulate the overall economy and create sustainable economic growth.

Research shows that domestic violence increases during tough economic times. Clubs can help by raising awareness and participating in the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence. Members can also help those staying at local domestic violence shelters by providing the residents with personal care items and other necessities.

More women needed in workplace to boost Japan's sagging economy

As Japan continues to reel from the impact of the global recession, women are being underused in the Japanese economy. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (located in Paris with a membership of 30 countries) recently stated that Japan's underemployment of women is a "considerable waste of valuable human resources, which needs to be addressed urgently."

The lack of women is especially dire in management in Japanese companies. In one major Japanese electronics firm in 2008, for example, only 170 managers out of 11,000 were women.

The government is being responsive, doing more to attract women in the workplace and keep them there. In 1985, Japan introduced the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, which prohibits discrimination against women. But some claim the law lacks teeth.

Changes are also needed in societal attitudes, according to Gender Equality in Japan, a Japanese government report. In that opinion survey, people were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "The husband should be the breadwinner; the wife should stay at home." Some 41.2 percent of Japanese respondents agreed with this statement, compared with only 18.1 percent in the U.S.

There are, however, encouraging signs that Japanese executives have recognized the need to attract and retain women talent. Some progressive businesses, such as Nissan, have realized that having women in their sales force has a positive impact on the bottom line, thereby boosting the sagging economy.

But with many Japanese companies still unresponsive, some women are taking initiative and seeking other options. Thanks to the Internet, more Japanese women have been starting e-businesses. According to a 2006 survey by the Center for the Advancement of Working Women based in Tokyo, 14.9 percent of female entrepreneurs in Japan founded their businesses in the information and communications industries.—M.Z.

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Women AS the stimulus

Proposals to fix the current global economy rarely discuss the critical role of women as the stimulus to economic recovery. Ernst & Young, a global leader in assurance, tax transaction, advisory services and strategic growth markets, released a recent report, "Groundbreakers: Using the strength of women to rebuild the global economy," that offers a powerful case for the advancement of women around the world as an overlooked and untapped way to meet the challenges of the global economy.

In that report, Laura D. Tyson, a professor of business administration and economics at the University of California (Berkeley) states: "To maximize its competitiveness and development potential, each country should strive for gender equality—i.e., to give women the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as men. In the current global financial and economic crisis, it is more vital than ever that women's economic participation does not shrink, but is in fact seen as an opportunity to make headway."

Many women's organizations, such as the National Women's Law Center, the Ms. Foundation for Women and the Global Fund for Women, agree. They advocate measures that include: giving women equal pay for equal work; educating and training women to move into quality jobs; investing in education and health care; engaging women directly in the policymaking process; and putting money into the hands of low-income people.

Soroptimist has worked since 1972 to help women lead better lives through its major program, the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards. Through the program, Soroptimist clubs in 19 countries and territories assist women who serve as the primary wage earners for their families by providing the financial and emotional resources they need to improve their education, skills and employment prospects. Since the program's inception, about \$25 million has been disbursed to help thousands of women achieve their dreams for themselves and their families.

Such programs are critical to helping women in today's financial climate. Also needed, however, is to make low-paying jobs, better paying jobs, says Gould. "Women have to be paid better in child care and home health care jobs. There needs to be more political will that these are important jobs in our society. It's important to increase wages and benefits," she adds. "Also, how do you move women into the higher paying jobs that already exist?"

Heidi Hartmann, Ph.D., agrees. "Solutions include raising pay for women and pay equity ... also equal opportunity employment laws have to be better enforced and we need to help women into non-traditional jobs," says the president of the Washington-based Institute for Women's Policy Research <iwpr.org> "Expanding unemployment insurance is good ... I'd also like to see more schooling and vocational training for low-income single mothers."

In the U.S., the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (see sidebar on page 14) addresses a number of women's concerns, including, among others, helping low-income parents obtain child care, and increasing and extending unemployment insurance coverage for jobless workers. The Act also provides for programs such as health care, education and other social services that preserve and create jobs in fields currently dominated by women.

Gould cautions that implementation in the roll out of the Recovery Act is equally important. Stimulus oversight commissions in each state will monitor the act, but in Pennsylvania, for instance, only one woman was appointed to the 13-member commission. "Women need to be included in how this money gets



spent and how it should be spent for women,” she says.

The Recovery Act can help stimulate the economy, and supporting low-income families who spend their monies locally on goods and services is key,

Entmacher says. “Many of the steps to alleviate the hardship of those most in need—such as boosting food stamps, expanding unemployment benefits, providing tax credits, direct housing assistance—all these help maintain spending of low-income households [mostly women-headed] and that’s money that goes right back into the economy. Economists across the political spectrum agree that this is where you get more bang for the buck in terms of a quick stimulus.”

“Womenomics”

Investing in women is critical to economic recovery in all parts of the world. Increasingly, women are becoming more important in the global marketplace—not just as workers, but also as consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and investors. Enter the concept “womenomics.” Introduced last year by the magazine “The Economist,” the womenomics phenomenon proposes that the future of the world economy lies in female hands. It found that over the past decade or so, increased female participation in the paid labor force had contributed more to the growth of the world economy than either the boom in China or new technology.

Although they may lack formal power, women are often in charge of their family’s finances and make the majority of spending decisions. Women in microlending programs have close to a 100 percent repayment rate. In general women are prudent financial managers. In recognition of this, more women are needed in formal positions of power to help clean up the global financial mess. Iceland, for example, went on a decade-long lending binge, making loans worth many times the Gross National Product. Now, the Icelandic government has hired women to manage the banks, with new female managers ensuring more conservative and prudent lending.

The relationship between women in managerial positions and corporate performance is well-documented. In one study, Fortune 500 companies with more women on their boards of directors turned in better financial performances than those with fewer women board members. Spain recently passed a law that

within seven years, companies must give four out of 10 board seats to women, and Germany and the Netherlands are heading in the same direction.

Ultimately, gender balance is good for business and companies are starting to take notice. A coalition of leading businessmen from 17 global companies voiced the “urgent need for more female and talented managers in business.”

“When women enter the labor force and enter management positions, they bring a different set of skills and life experiences with them,” Gould says. “It all adds up to more and better productivity because of the diversity issue ... we bring our creativity to the business place. So we have to keep asking the question: Is everybody at the table and what are the systemic and structural barriers keeping certain people away from the table?”

Would the current economic crisis have been avoided if more women headed financial institutions? Impossible to say. But it is certain that women’s voices are needed at all decision-making tables. And while some progress has been made, much more needs to be done.

“We really have to make every effort to reach out to women in their own communities who have experience and are working on the front lines,” Gould says. “These women have the capacity to lend their perspective and understanding on these issues to governments and other public policy actors. The truth is, very few women are represented at decision-making tables—whether it’s business, finance or government circles.”

At a time when the global economy is facing its greatest challenges, many women’s advocates say that any economic recovery must invest in women, with women-led solutions central to the plan.

“Women aren’t a special interest group,” Gould says. “We’re half the population. The wise African leader and statesman, the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, said that a ‘person doesn’t walk very far or very fast on one leg. How can we expect half the people to be able to develop a nation?’ We’re standing on one leg if we’re not working ardently to bring into the economy all of the potential of women who have been left out of it for so long. Women’s economic health IS fundamental to a country’s economic health.” 🌐

Marielena Zuniga is SIR’s staff writer. Winner of the 2009 Croly Award, she is a long-time contributor to Best for Women magazine.

Email: marielena@soroptimist.org

In the next issue: Child brides. Please email Editor Jessica Levinson <jessica@soroptimist.org> with relevant information.

Reclaiming the Dream:

2009 Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards Federation Recipients

Women overcoming obstacles to live full and productive lives—that's what the Women's Opportunity Awards make possible. Since 1972, Soroptimist has helped thousands of women triumph over domestic violence, poverty, drug abuse and other challenges to reclaim their dreams. This year, Soroptimist awarded \$10,000 federation-level awards to three remarkable women: Lisa Wuthrich Curless of Bountiful, Utah, USA; Xiu Man Huang of TaiChung County, Taiwan; and Miki Kitamura, of Otsu City, Shiga, Japan.

Lisa Wuthrich Curless

Lisa Wuthrich Curless' husband did everything for her. He took care of the bills. He made the house and car payments. He took care of insurance. All this enabled Lisa to raise their four children and care for their home in Bountiful, Utah, USA.

Then, on his 45th birthday—out of the blue—Lisa's husband committed suicide. He didn't show signs of depression. Nor did he indicate that anything was less than perfect in their 15-year marriage, she says.

If possible, Lisa's situation grew worse. After her husband's death, she learned that their home had second and third mortgages on it. Their cars had loans that exceeded their value. Their bank account was in the negative. They had no savings and owed thousands of dollars to the IRS.

"I came to the realization that I was a widow at 35 who did not know anything," Lisa says. "I didn't know what the utility bills were, what the house payment was, where the car loans went, what checking accounts and credit cards we had. I knew nothing about my life."

With her home in foreclosure and her car being repossessed, Lisa had to start her life over. She had four children, ages 5 to 14, to support and had not been in the workforce for 13 years. She had no formal education beyond high school.

Lisa ultimately realized she had two choices. She could give up and make the same decision her husband had made. Or, she could fight. Calling herself a "fighter" and "survivor," she knew she had to buck up and learn what she needed to know to give her children the lives they deserved.

"I knew I had a responsibility to my children and to myself," Lisa says. "I looked into their four little, beautiful faces and realized that I was the only hope they had, that as their mother I had to find a way to survive this."

As a woman in today's world, Lisa knew she needed an education to move forward. So, she enrolled at Salt Lake

Community College, where she is studying dental hygiene, with plans to graduate in 2011. "Getting my education is absolutely necessary for me to be able to care for my children," she says.

Living in a neighbor's home and surviving on Social Security payments with some help from her church, Lisa was in dire financial need. She applied for the Women's Opportunity Award and learned she was a federation-level recipient on the one-year anniversary of her husband's death.

As an SI/Bountiful club-level recipient nominated by Soroptimist's Rocky Mountain Region, she has been using the awards to help with food, housing, clothes, school tuition, books and transportation.

Even though the last year has been devastating, Lisa feels extremely hopeful. "At a time when my life seemed the darkest and when I could barely find the will to breathe, I have witnessed more love and more selflessness and more beauty than I ever saw in the world before. I have hope in people, and most of all, hope in myself."

Xiu Man Huang

Xiu Man Huang of TaiChung County, Taiwan, often thought of giving up on life. But she knew she couldn't leave behind her family—especially her two children, both with multiple disabilities and severe autism.

Her 22-year-old son lives at home, requiring Xiu Man's care. Her 17-year-old daughter studies at TaiChung Special Education School, but Xiu Man must accompany her to and from school because she cannot go by herself on the bus. "She has serious emotional problems and needs long-term medical treatment in order to alleviate symptoms and self-inflicted behaviors," Xiu Man says. In addition, her husband has a chronic disease and receives treatment at a long-term care facility, where Xiu Man often visits. She also has a married older daughter, who has a busy life and schedule.

Because of her caregiving responsibilities, Xiu Man was unable to work outside the home and was struggling financially. To support her family, she learned how to make handcrafts—such as handmade soaps, candles in glass jars and innovative note cards—selling them to organizations. Since she didn't have a storefront and was busy caring for her two children, she was not successful with sales and business was limited.

Supplementing her income with part-time cleaning jobs, she had another idea. She decided to try Internet marketing strate-



Photo Credit: Don Tracy



Photo Credit: Ideo Lee

gies to sell her products, even though she had never used a computer in her life.

"I was fortunate to receive the Women's Opportunity Awards from SI/Hsin-Chu Hsien and Taiwan Region," she says, "and Tien-Lung Technology Internet Company was willing to assist me in learning Internet set up and marketing so I could continue making products at home and selling them online at the same time."

Xiu Man's dream, however, includes others beyond her own family. She wants to mentor other adult autistic children and create a "work haven" for them. "My own autistic son could not go out to work. I would like to provide opportunities to let other kids with similar situations have a place to work and make a living to improve their family lives," she says.

After establishing a web-selling platform and successfully reaching her sales goals, Xiu Man plans to work with the TaiChung Autism Educational Society to help families with situations like hers sell their products through her web store.

As the federation-level Women's Opportunity Award recipient, Xiu Man can now learn more skills and broaden the scope of her business capabilities. "This leads the way for more families dealing with autism to follow my entrepreneurial model," she says.

Ultimately, Xiu Man is grateful to work at home and to be able to care for her children. And she continues to look forward. "We can not relive our lives, so we all must look to our future," she says. "I had the courage to apply for this award because I wish for a beautiful future."

Miki Kitamura

Miki Kitamura was in tears when she visited the student support office at Shiga University of Medical Science in Shiga, Japan. That day, she told them that she couldn't pay for her second semester studies.

Her father had died in February 2008, leaving her family in serious debt. Her mother has disabilities and can't speak well. Her two younger sisters are physically weak with emotional problems. Her younger brother had to quit his university studies because the family no longer had money.

As the oldest, Miki became the head of the household, working part-time and struggling to support her family while going to school. "I was trying to complete my studies and support my family, but I could barely pay my tuition and it was extremely difficult to get through each day," says Miki of Otsu City, Shiga, Japan.



Photo Credit: Yasu Nakaoka

Miki had always dreamed of becoming a doctor. As a child, she had been hospitalized several times, remembering the hospital as a "scary" place where she received injections and had to be away from her mother for long periods.

"There were nurses, however, who comforted me all the time when I cried," she recalls. "Every time I went to the hospital, doctors and nurses smiled at me saying, 'Hope you will get better soon,' and 'I am so glad you are getting better.' When I was sick with a high fever, these kind words were very comforting to me."

Those kindnesses left an indelible mark on Miki, who decided she wanted to help other people the same way. "I wanted to feel connected with people," she says, "and I wanted to help other people by making use of my experiences. I decided to become a medical doctor. I am learning not only medical knowledge and skills, but also how to understand the needs and concern of patients."

Chosen by SI/Otsu and Japan Chuo Region for club and region-level awards, Miki calls the Women's Opportunity Awards an "inspiration and blessing." She is using her award to finish medical school, which in Japan is a six-year combined undergraduate/graduate program. She plans to graduate in March 2010, and then conduct her clinical training near her mother's house, so she can care for her while working as a resident.

A staff member of the university said: "I believe that our society needs a medical doctor like Ms. Kitamura who understands the pain of others and the importance of living life with great determination."

Miki is grateful for the awards, making it possible to live her dream of becoming a doctor, supporting her family and giving back to society. "I feel a deep appreciation to staff of the university and Soroptimist members who encouraged me to apply," she says. "I will do my best to become a doctor like the ones I admired when I was a child." 🌍

**By Marielena Zuniga
Staff Writer**

Email: marielena@soroptimist.org

By participating in the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards program, clubs can make a profound difference in the lives of women like Lisa, Xiu Man and Miki. Without generous donations from clubs and individuals, it would not be possible to continue this remarkable program. To make a donation or download program materials, visit Soroptimist.org.



Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award 2009 Federation Recipient: Stephanie Davis

Stephanie Davis has a website address that says it all—Stephcares.com. And believe it. Stephanie does care. About children. About volunteering. About autism. And she’s been caring about others ever since she was 6 years old.

Because of her volunteer spirit, SIA’s Northeastern Region nominated Stephanie for the Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award, which recognizes girls, ages 14 to 17, who work to better their communities and the world. She went on to be named the 2009 federation-level recipient.

As the region award winner, Stephanie received \$1,000 for herself and \$1,000 for the Lighthouse Program. She also received \$250 from the SI/Bridgeport, Connecticut, club, with an additional \$250 going to the Lighthouse Program. Because Stephanie is the federation finalist, the Lighthouse Program received \$2,500.

Now a 15-year-old student at Trumbull High School in Connecticut, Stephanie started volunteering as a child, going with her mother to Operation Hope in Bridgeport—a shelter for homeless women.

“My experience there made me want to do more for my neighboring community,” she says. “When I was 11, after years of persistence, I convinced my mother to help me find my own volunteer job and she connected me with The Lighthouse Program in Bridgeport.”

The program is located in 24 elementary schools in Bridgeport, an urban community about 10 minutes from suburban Trumbull, where Stephanie and her family live. Economic conditions in Bridgeport are difficult, and many parents must work

long hours to support their families. The program offers children a safe after-school environment where they can do homework and receive tutoring.

“In my years of volunteering there, I have worked in two Bridgeport schools, volunteering every Tuesday for almost four years,” Stephanie says. “I help students with their homework, read them stories and play a variety of games with them ... or just spend time with them.”

Stephanie has done much more for the program, however. Two years ago she began a winter clothing drive when one of the students came to her, crying hysterically because she had lost her only winter hat. Stephanie mailed out flyers to family and friends and was able to collect winter clothing, as well as some cash donations.

When an increase in fees forced 1,000 families to drop out of the Lighthouse program, she began an annual fundraising campaign—writing letters to businesses in Bridgeport and telling them about the program’s need for funding.

“I have continued the fundraiser for two years and now have 30 companies that contribute to scholarships for students to attend the program,” she says. “In 2007, my campaign raised \$1,900 and in 2008 it raised \$5,495, resulting in scholarships for over 60 children for the summer program run by the Lighthouse.”

In addition to the money Stephanie raised, monies from the Violet Richardson Award helped send 173 kids to the summer program on scholarship, she says, enabling her to exceed her fundraising goals.

Through her association with clubs in her high school, Stephanie also raises awareness about the program to recruit more volunteers. “My goal is to have

enough new volunteers to fill a small school bus that will run from the high school to Bridgeport once a week,” she says.

If all that weren’t enough, Stephanie also serves as president for the STAND (Students Taking Action Now in Darfur) club at her high school, and volunteers to raise awareness about autism, citing her two older cousins with autism as her inspiration and motivation.

Despite all her volunteering, she finds time to do “ordinary teen things,” she says. She loves art and expressing herself creatively, but admits that ultimately, her heart is in community service.

“I love being involved and supporting causes I dedicate myself to,” she says. “Although it’s hard, I always try to get my friends involved in helping and spreading awareness of causes. It also feels so good to get younger children involved and inspired to take their time to do service work.”

Admitting genuine surprise at receiving the award, she says, “I know there are so many people doing amazing things and there is so much more I can do for the causes I support. I often feel that I’m not doing enough. I was mostly so excited [winning the Violet Richardson Award] to know that I could send more children on scholarship to the Lighthouse Program.”

Stephanie hasn’t decided which college to attend yet, but she says that no matter where the future takes her, she plans on volunteering for the rest of her life. States Stephanie: “There is nothing like the feeling I get from helping others.”

**By Marielena Zuniga
Staff Writer**

Email: marielena@soroptimist.org

“My life was transformed when I discovered that helping as a volunteer brought immeasurable satisfaction.”



Soroptimist Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women 2009 Federation Recipient: Edelvira Goes Ramos

When Edelvira Goes Ramos first moved to a slum area of the Curitiba municipal district, Paraná, Brazil, she called herself a simple “carrinheira.” That is a person who walks the streets with a little wheelbarrow collecting recycled garbage to sell. Her intent? To support her community and the women of the area in any way she could.

Since 1985, Edelvira has been doing just that. Not only did she found a daycare center whose mission is to give community mothers a safe place to leave their children when they go to work, she continues to help women find jobs, and to discover their self-esteem and dignity.

For these reasons and more, Edelvira, 52, has been named the recipient of Soroptimist’s 2009 Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women (formerly called the Making a Difference Award), nominated by SI/Curitiba-Batel, Brazil. The award honors women who, through personal or professional activities, work to improve the lives of other women and girls. As the federation finalist, Edelvira received \$5,000 from Soroptimist, which she is using to fund her charitable work.

“It’s impossible for me to express how happy I am with this award,” Edelvira said. “Tears are falling from my face and I can’t find the appropriate words. The award came at the exact moment when our community needs a lot of help.”

When Edelvira and her family first moved to the impoverished area, they had no financial help from their town hall or government. With her assistance, however, the community residents began to petition public agencies to improve basic living conditions—paved roads, streetlights, water and electricity. Today, the district is known as Uberaba de Cima and has about 32,000 residents and four associations. Edelvira is president of one of the associations.

At first, she helped the district women by watching their children while they went to work. When the number of children grew, she began to use her own home, keeping only one room for her own family’s use. Eventually founding her daycare center, Edelvira began to see other needs and responded.

She worked with women who stayed at home, teaching them to groom themselves, to read and write, to sew, and to make arts and crafts. “I wanted the women to regain self-esteem and create jobs and income for them,” she says.

Maria Aparecida Candido, 58, is one of those women. “She has a very sick husband and now she transforms donated fabric scraps into beautiful bedspreads,” Edelvira says.

Edelvira also helps Benilda Ramos, 56, to sell her arts and crafts. Today, both Maria and Benilda are supported financially through this work, and dream of a cooperative where they can manufacture, store and sell their products. “I have been trying to get a space for many women to sell their products,” Edelvira says.

“Our volunteers feel happy and satisfied with their activities,” states Edelvira. “These volunteers understand they are taking children out of the streets, giving them love, and passing on values.”

With early pregnancy common in the community, Edelvira, as an association president, also helps many pregnant, homeless girls living on the streets. “They suffer pains, sickness and hunger,” she says. “I make sure the girls receive pre-natal care at the community health center. I also try to guide the girls about early pregnancy and how to avoid or face this situation.”

Each day, she continues to transform the lives of women in her community, helping them with self-esteem issues, and supporting domestic violence victims. She also instructs women about their citizenship rights, finds them jobs, and helps them with needed work documentation and bus passes. Edelvira even supplies clothing and hairdressers so the women look professional for their job interviews.

Today, Edelvira continues to dedicate herself to her volunteer work, maintaining the daycare center with donations, presiding over the community association by having all families registered, and taking care of the community women.

“My life was transformed when I discovered that helping as a volunteer brought immeasurable satisfaction,” she says. “My greatest dream is to have a larger place to do my work, and also to set up a sewing cooperative and trade courses dedicated to women. The purpose of my volunteer work is to recover women’s self-esteem and their rights. I thank God and Soroptimist for this award, which will allow our work to continue growing—helping women and girls to achieve their best.”

By Marielena Zuniga
Staff Writer
Email: marielena@soroptimist.org

Soroptimist members work to improve the lives of women and girls by accomplishing strategic outcomes as outlined in SIA's Strategic Plan. **Program Notes** provides information pertaining to these objectives. To read SIA's Strategic Plan, visit Soroptimist.org.

Endangered MDGs

The global financial crisis is imperiling attainment of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and creating an emergency for development, according to a joint International Monetary Fund World Bank Report released earlier this year. "The Global Monitoring Report 2009: A Development Emergency" warns that although the first goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015 from its 1990 level is still reachable based on current projections, risks abound. Most of the eight globally agreed-upon goals are unlikely to be met, according to the report, including MDG 3: promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Bolivia Upholds Women's Rights

Earlier this year, a referendum of Bolivians approved a new Constitution, which for the first time dedicates a chapter to women's rights. The Constitution contains several clauses that uphold the health and rights of women, including:

- the right to physical, psychological and sexual integrity;
- the right of women to live free from discrimination, violence, sexual coercion and emotional abuse;
- a provision that guarantees pay equality for women;
- and the right of women, married or unmarried, to land ownership.

Women's groups were instrumental in helping frame the new Constitution, by identifying the most controversial topics and developing a strategy for placing them in the public debate.

Women Fiscally Responsible

A recent global Reuters Synovate survey found that women are less likely to get into debt and strive harder to become financially independent. Conducted in Australia, Brazil,

Bulgaria, Canada, France, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, South Africa, Britain and the United States, the poll showed that more than half the respondents of both genders said women are more responsible with money than men. The highest level of agreement was found in Mexico, where 72 percent of people believed women were better at handling finances. More women believed in their financial ability than did men, with 61 percent of women saying they were more responsible, while only 40 percent of men agreed. But nearly half the women surveyed also conceded they were bigger spenders than their male counterparts, with nearly 60 percent of men agreeing.

The survey's findings could help financial companies understand women's needs, according to survey experts, as they tend to live longer than men and typically have less money upon retiring.

Ending Violence Against Women

Men and boys must play their part in ending worldwide violence against women and girls, said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, earlier this year.

"In too many countries, women are still not seen as equals in the eye of the law or the minds of men and boys," he told participants. "Men must teach each other that real men do not violate or oppress women—and that a woman's place is not just in the home or field, but in schools and offices and boardrooms."

The symposium mobilized men to take an active stand for gender equality and health, and developed the Rio Call to Action to promote men's involvement in realizing gender equality worldwide. For more information and to read the call, go to www.engagingmen2009.org.

Midwife Shortage

The number of midwives worldwide would have to more than double to meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing maternal and infant deaths by 2015, according to the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Maternal mortality is the "highest health inequity in the world with more than 99 percent of deaths [in pregnancy and childbirth] occurring in the developing world," according to a statement by WHO, the World Bank, United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund. In 2008, the agencies pledged to work with governments to fill the "urgent need for skilled health workers, particularly midwives." Read the June/July/August 2008 *Best for Women* feature article, "Is There a Doctor in the House?" online at Soroptimist.org/articles/article_obstetricians.html.

Preventing Child Marriage

The U.S. House and Senate are considering the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009, sponsored by Representative Betty McCollum, and Senators Dick Durbin and Olympia Snowe. The legislation would authorize U.S. foreign assistance funding over four years to prevent child marriage, and provide educational and economic opportunities to girls in the developing world.

The House of Representatives recently passed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, which included provisions for the child marriage bill (HR 2103). As of publication time, the bill had been received in the Senate, read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations. "It is deeply troubling that little girls, only 9 or 10 years old, are being given as child brides to men sometimes decades older, putting these girls

at risk for contracting HIV, dying in childbirth, delivering underweight babies or living in extreme poverty,” said McCollum. Read the December/January/February 2010 issue of *Best for Women* magazine, which will feature an article about child brides.

Women in Peru Murdered

Peru’s Ministry for Women and Social Development announced earlier this year that 19 women are killed every month by their spouses. Minister Carmen Vildoso announced that female homicides in Peru were increasing. At the beginning of 2009, nine women were murdered every month by their spouse or former mate, Vildoso said. That figure has now doubled. “That is tragic,” she added. “We have to improve the service provided by police stations and the Judicial Power.” Even though no official reason for the sudden increase was stated by the Peruvian Ministry for Women, some NGOs and women’s organizations attribute the high numbers of murders to a lack of government funds dedicated to prevention and protection, and a weak justice system that perpetrates impunity.

Gender Addressed at Climate Talks

From June 1-12, the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change met in Bonn, Germany, to negotiate a post-2012 framework. References to the human dimension of climate change—including gender—are increasingly common in the negotiations. The Icelandic delegation has taken the lead at submitting gender issues for consideration but has been supported by other delegations throughout the world. Non-governmental organizations such as UNIFEM, Women’s Environment and Development Organization and Energia are working to keep the gender dimensions of climate change at the forefront of the negotiated text. To learn more, visit <wedo.org/category/learn/campaigns/climatechange>.

2009 December 10th Appeal

SI President Hanne Jensbo has announced the 2009 December 10th Appeal, also known as the President’s Appeal. This year it will be Hopes and Dreams for Everyone. The goal of this project is to prevent human trafficking in Moldova by providing life-skill education and sustainable living conditions for vulnerable children. Project partners include the International Organization for Migration, Geneva and the Child Rights Information Center, Moldova. Donations, earmarked for the appeal, can be sent to SIA headquarters. For more information, please visit the SI website at <soroptimistinternational.org>. 🌐

By Lori Blair
Senior Director of Program Services
Email: lori@soroptimist.org

PROJECTS

Soroptimist International of the Americas projects:

- Soroptimist Women’s Opportunity Awards
- Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls
- Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence
- Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award
- Soroptimist Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women
- Soroptimists STOP Trafficking
- Soroptimist Disaster Recovery Fund for Women and Girls

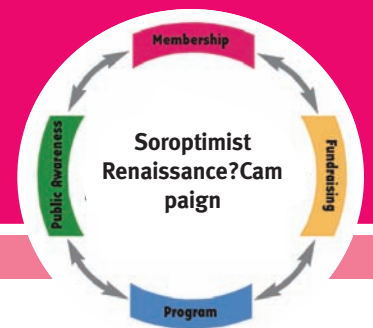
For information about these projects, model program kits, and other resources and materials, visit <Soroptimist.org>.

Soroptimist International projects:

- SI Quadrennial Project: Project Sierra
- December 10th SI President’s Appeal: Hopes and Dreams for Everyone

For more information about these projects visit <SoroptimistInternational.org>.

membership



New Member Orientations that Work

If you get new members involved and experiencing value within 60 days of joining your club, you dramatically increase the odds of them renewing at the end of their first year of membership. An effective new member orientation helps speed this process. The bottom line goal of an orientation event is to inspire new members to become active, long-term members. Additional goals include:

- Giving new members a better picture of your club and how they can fit in—and find value.
- Meeting key players in your club.
- Meeting other new members.
- Making them aware of opportunities for their involvement.
- And, reselling them on what a great idea it was to join your club!

Five tips for a dynamite orientation:

1. Keep the "official talk" short and to the point.

Too often club orientations are boring and long-winded. You need to leave time for new members to meet others. In a one-hour orientation, presentations should be kept to 20 minutes or less. Give specific time limits to anyone who is going to talk. You want new members to be excited about joining your group—not dreading the next boring meeting.

2. Have key members such as your board, officers, and committee chairs attend and mingle with the new members.

New members are very excited to get a moment of an officer's time. This short interaction helps them feel like they are an important addition to your club. It's also a great time for one-on-one recruiting for committee work. This personal interaction is a powerful way to get new members involved.

3. Help new members meet others at your orientations.

You can use "ice breaker" activities to get the conversation flowing. Another idea is to have an older member host and introduce each new member around. It's also a great time for a

short, interactive program on how to build their network in your club. Remember your goal is to help new members to find buddies in your group—it makes it easier for them to get involved.

4. Provide new members with a sign-up sheet for committee and special project work.

As your new members meet different chairs and hear about various projects, they'll get a feel for what's a good fit for them. Some may hand in their sheet that night. Most new members will be overwhelmed and need to turn it in later.

5. Have someone follow up with new members within two weeks of attending your orientation.

Check to see if they have any more questions. If they have not filled in the committee work sheets, the follow-up person can do it over the phone. Follow-up callers should encourage new members to attend the next event and share any details that will make the new member feel more confident—like they are "in the know."

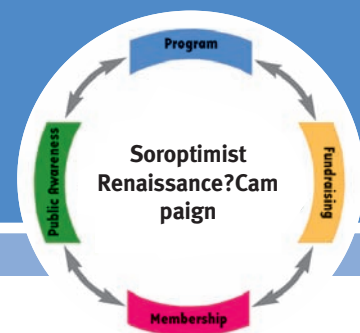
A well-planned orientation helps your new members confidently take their first steps in building a long-term relationship with your club.

By Cynthia D'Amour, MBA
www.chapterleadersplayground.org

Cynthia D'Amour, MBA, founder of the Chapter Leaders Playground, is the author of several books including "How to Turn Generation Me into Active Members of Your Association" and is a frequent speaker at leadership events. Cynthia has been a presenter at several SIA events and will be a keynote speaker at the 41st Biennial Convention in San Francisco this July. 🌐



program



The Program Year Ahead

Each new club year signals new developments in the program department. Building on success and research from the previous year, resources and information are provided to clubs to assist in their work of improving the lives of women and girls—in local communities and throughout the world. The goals of the program department are to make it easier for clubs to conduct mission-focused projects, and to keep members informed of major issues facing women and girls worldwide.

Last year, SIA focused on increasing participation in the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards with a special incentive for regions that reached 100 percent. SIA had great results, with a 12 percent increase in participation. In 2008-2009, 1,047 clubs honored 1,173 women with Women's Opportunity Awards, bringing the total participation to 74 percent. Altogether, Soroptimist gave \$1.45 million to these women to help them live their dreams.

This year, the program department will be rejuvenating existing resources and encouraging their use—specifically white papers and model program kits. Soroptimist currently offers 13 white papers on issues including disaster relief, poverty, the pay gap and education. Each white paper provides a summary of the literature while raising awareness about its importance, and pointing to solutions at the international, national and local levels. Each paper highlights work done by Soroptimist to address the issue as well. New topics for this year include child and mail-order brides, prostitution and the demand side of trafficking.

How can clubs use these white papers? White papers can spur club interest in a new area. They can serve as the backbone

of a program meeting to educate club members on an important issue. Thousands of people are reading the Soroptimist white papers each year. Are you? Look for additional topics throughout the year.

Soroptimist currently offers seven model program kits on topics including domestic violence, teen dating violence, mentoring for girls, breast cancer, heart disease and sex trafficking. Model program kits provide clubs with all the information needed to undertake a local-level project. Ideas for the model program kits come from successful local Soroptimist club projects. All model program kits include background information about the topic, steps for conducting a community assessment, and a variety of programs from which clubs can choose. Several of the kits are scheduled for an update this year, and a new one is in the works on holding a girls' conference. Also look for a Soroptimist Snapshot Survey asking for opinions about model program kits.

But that's not all. SIA will also update the information on the Soroptimists STOP

Trafficking website. Many people searching for information about "human trafficking" on the internet arrive at the Soroptimist website, making it important to engage these visitors. To do this, SIA is currently considering featuring local Soroptimists STOP trafficking projects more prominently and providing a special action activity for site visitors to take part in.

It is shaping up to be another busy year in the program department. The Program Council will offer its invaluable help and expertise throughout the year. But remember, Program Council members can be just as helpful to you! Clubs can find their region Program Council member's name and contact information in the leadership directory in the member's area at <Soroptimist.org>.

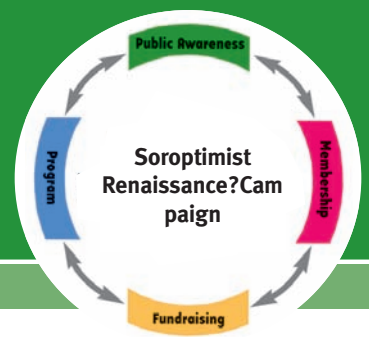
The staff in the program department—Lori, Dawn and Julia—are available to help with questions big and small. Please do not hesitate to contact them at <siahq@soroptimist.org>. ☺

By Lori Blair
Senior Director of Program Services
Email: lori@soroptimist.org

This year, make the distribution and collection of applications for federation projects easier by using the writeable applications for the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity and Violet Richardson award programs. Clubs can distribute and receive completed applications by email. Then clubs can easily forward the applications to judges and to the district or region chair. (When forwarding applications for district or region judging, don't forget to include the writeable club transmittal.) The emailable applications and instructions for using them are in the program section of the member's area at Soroptimist.org.



public awareness



Profile on Public Awareness

This club year, various methods will be used to increase awareness of Soroptimist and its mission to improve the lives of women and girls. Check out these exciting initiatives:

Second Annual Live Your Dream Art Contest

The first Live Your Dream art contest, which received more than 4,350 entries from children around the world, was a huge success. This year's contest will ask children to draw a present-day woman who inspires them. The public will be able to vote online and winners will be announced on March 8, International Women's Day.

Social Media

Last issue's public awareness article shared the benefits of taking part in the social media revolution. Over the past few months, Soroptimist has created a presence on various social networking sites, including LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, BlogTalkRadio, YouTube and Flickr. Using social media is a great way for Soroptimist to speak directly to members, affiliates, friends and donors. SIA's social networking sites draw more followers every day. Soroptimist will continue to leverage these opportunities. To get in the network, click on the social networking buttons on the Soroptimist homepage at <Soroptimist.org>.

Soroptimist will engage the public with social media by holding some fun contests this year. Look for an upcoming Flickr contest asking people to post pictures of themselves pledging to help women live their dreams, and a YouTube contest asking people to submit short videos of themselves living their dreams.

Soroptimist Website

Soroptimist.org is doing well and continues to receive nearly 30,000 visits each month, but it needs some refreshing, such as an updated homepage, a new links section and more.

In addition, the Live Your Dream Campaign will have a new home on the Soroptimist website. Now is the time to more closely

align the Live Your Dream idea with Soroptimist. The merger of these two sites will shore up both brands.

New Webisode Series

The new Live Your Dream section will also feature the latest webisode series about past Women's Opportunity Awards recipient Tyra Wright-Johnson, who shares various aspects of her life, including the abusive relationship she experienced with an ex-boyfriend; her struggle to make ends meet when she lost her job; her journey to finish school; and her desire to help other women by becoming a Soroptimist. Stay tuned for the debut of the new series.

New Promotional Tools

Soroptimist will provide new promotional ads in all languages that can be used to raise awareness about Soroptimist. Clubs can use these marketing tools in various ways, such as distributing them at women's conferences and recruiting events, and putting them in media kits.

"Women of Soroptimist" Book

Headquarters is in the beginning stages of creating a keepsake book highlighting some of the inspirational stories of Soroptimist award recipients. More to follow.

Spanish and Portuguese Videos

Headquarters worked with clubs from Brazil, América del Sur and Mexico/Centroamerica regions to obtain video footage of club projects. A new organizational video has been produced in Spanish and Portuguese that will enable clubs in Latin America to spread awareness about Soroptimist and the mission.

Clubs are urged to participate in and use these tools and initiatives to help increase awareness of Soroptimist's mission to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world. 🌐

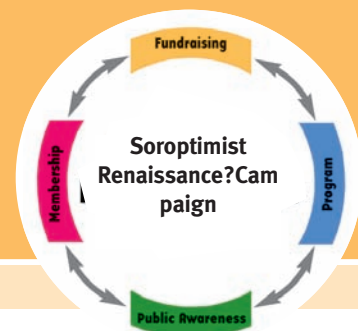
By Kamali Brooks
Public?Relations Manager
Email: kamali@soroptimist.org

The Soroptimist Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women

The Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award has a new name—the Soroptimist Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women. The new name recognizes and honors the first federation president, Ruby Lee Minar. Also, a ruby is a deep red gemstone associated with wisdom, importance, vitality, strength, vivacity, power and love: all words embodying the strong and compassionate women who receive this award. Beyond the new name, the award remains the same. It continues to recognize women who work to improve the lives of women and girls through their professional or volunteer work.

During this transition phase, when referencing the new award, it is fine to say "formerly the Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award." New publicity materials for clubs to promote the Soroptimist Ruby Award are available in the program section of Soroptimist.org.

fundraising



Investing in Women and Girls

Recent headlines reflect a heightened awareness of the importance of investing in women and girls. The Clinton Global Initiative focused its September 2009 meeting on investing in women and girls to narrow the gender gap. Philanthropists Peter & Jennifer Buffet's NoVo Foundation seeks to empower women and girls as primary agents of change. And numerous other funding organizations are recognizing that when women are educated and healthy all of society benefits.

Since 1921, Soroptimists have worked to be change agents for women through projects and programs that increase economic empowerment; advance gender equity; and promote health, safety and wellbeing. For generations, the work of Soroptimists has made an impact on countless women in every country of the federation. Today, many women who benefited from local and federation Soroptimist programs in the past are now successful and helping new generations of women. And some have returned the favor by becoming a Soroptimist.

Your investment is evidenced by the time and financial assistance you give to Soroptimist programs. Over time, we have made important progress. But our work is not done. Time and money is necessary to continue our work for the rights and opportunities women deserve.

- The Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards, our cornerstone program, is of vital importance—helping women who are the primary source of financial support for their families by providing them with resources to improve their education, skills and employment opportunities. Thanks to this program, many women today are living their dreams, and moving out of poverty and abusive situations into jobs and brighter futures for themselves and their families. The federation invests \$377,000 in direct awards annually as part of SIA's major program.

- Soroptimist Club Grants for women and girls help clubs with projects that generate measurable results in their communities by addressing specific local needs. Last year, 97 worthy grant applications were submitted totaling \$674,000. The federation was able to invest \$175,000 in 37 Soroptimist club projects that impacted almost 12,000 women. Grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000 were given to projects such as increasing awareness of sex trafficking; providing support and education for mothers; supporting services for domestic violence and rape victims; and supplying free or low-cost health services.

- Creating awareness and sustainable social change are integral parts of Soroptimists STOP Trafficking, the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence and other mission-focused programs that help transform systems and attitudes. Soroptimist invests staff time and dollars to develop products and services to help clubs take action on these issues.

Contributions from you—our members and clubs—along with those from friends who support our mission, are critical to the success of these programs and initiatives.

Soroptimist programs require more than \$1.5 million each year.

Another way to ensure that these programs will continue creating positive social change is to arrange for a future gift to Soroptimist. Without any outlay of cash right now, you can make a bequest, arrange for a charita-

ble gift annuity or trust, provide a gift of retirement assets, or name Soroptimist as beneficiary of an insurance policy. Through these future gifts you can ensure that Soroptimist programs remain strong and viable.

Please visit planyourlegacy.soroptimist.org for more information about planned gifts and how you can invest in the future of women. To learn more about Soroptimist's programs and how your contributions sustain the Soroptimist mission, review the annual report and the program impact report found at Soroptimist.org.

Remember, supporting women is a high-yield investment. Our collective investment has the strength to empower thousands of women and girls, and provide "assets" that will surely only grow in value.

By Nancy Montvydas
Senior Director of Development
Email: nancym@soroptimist.org

Donor Spotlight on Carene Davis-Stitt

"I want to be able to say that I did everything I could so that all women and girls have the rights and opportunities they deserve to have." This belief epitomizes Carene Davis-Stitt, who is committed to the Soroptimist mission in many ways. Carene, of Eugene, Oregon, USA, gives her time, talents and money to Soroptimist because she believes so strongly in what SIA does to improve the lives of women and girls. In addition to being a member of SI/Eugene and Northwestern Region governor, Carene is also editor of "The International Soroptimist." By her own admission, Carene is not a wealthy member. Yet, she has managed to reach the Envoy level of the Laurel Society, continues to support Soroptimist programs on a monthly basis, and is a member of the Laurel Legacy.

Carene's hope is that by helping women and girls gain greater self-esteem and new opportunities, they will go after their dreams and build stronger families, communities and a better world.

She is doing what she can now, and ensuring that the work of Soroptimist will continue for generations to come. Thank you, Carene, for your dedication to Soroptimist!



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Darlene Friedman Managing Editor
Jessica Levinson Editor and Designer
Marielena Zuniga Staff Writer
Laurie Graf Communications Assistant

Published by Soroptimist International of the Americas
Leigh Wintz, CAE, Executive Director

Soroptimist Headquarters and Editorial Offices:

1709 Spruce Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-6103
Telephone: (215) 893-9000
Fax: (215) 893-5200
Email: siahq@soroptimist.org
Website: Soroptimist.org

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Colleen Sword has a lot on her plate. This single mom has five special needs kids and is working toward a college degree. And now she is one step closer to living her dream.



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