

# Her Seat at the Table

By Beth S. Stedman and Jennifer H. Boyles

The rising power and influence of women globally is considered to be the most significant social trend for the next 20 years according to futurist Mary O'Hara-Devereaux. Women will continue to make considerable progress and gain power as decision makers socially, politically, and economically. Yet, in spite of the progress that is being made, the status of women in South Carolina continues to lag behind that of women in other states in the U.S. when a number of key indicators are considered:

- Women are still underpaid. Although 34 percent of South Carolina's employed women work in managerial and professional positions, women earn only 73.7 cents for each dollar earned by a man.
- Women are poor. Fifteen percent of South Carolina's women live in poverty and nearly one-third of single women with children live in poverty.
- Women are unhealthy. South Carolina ranks 40th in the nation for women's overall health and well being.
- Women are victims of domestic abuse at alarming levels. Since 2000, South Carolina has ranked in the top 10 states in the nation for women murdered by men.
- Women are under-educated. Nearly one-third of South Carolina's women lack a high school diploma, as compared to 25.2 percent nationally.
- Women are massively missing in the ranks of state leadership. South Carolina ranks 50th in the U.S. for women serving in state elected office. South Carolina currently is the only state in the nation to have no women elected to its state senate.

Given these challenges, how can we begin to address questions of equity

and empowerment so that women and their families can enjoy greater economic opportunity and an overall improved quality of life?

SC Women's Connection, an initiative of the Clemson (University) Institute for Economic and Community Development and Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, was created to facilitate and further develop the leadership capacity and raise the status of women in the Palmetto State. Through its educational programs and seminars, SCWC empowers



women to become dynamic participants in the leadership of businesses, civic organizations, non-profits and government, and to be actively engaged in community stewardship and philanthropy. SCWC brings together women and men who are interested in sharing their experiences and expertise to create pathways for positive social, political, and economic change by developing the leadership capacity of women in our state.

Current focus areas include:

- Leadership Development and Civic Engagement: We seek to develop a diversity of women leaders for government, for-profit, and non-profit sectors to include running for political office and serving on boards and commissions. By increasing women's representation at the decision-making

tables, we will help bring a more balanced, diverse perspective to public and private policymaking.

- Personal and Professional Development: We provide opportunities for women to enhance their skills and knowledge so that they can lead more successful and fulfilling lives at work and at home.
- Entrepreneurship: Business development programs assist women as they expand their options for economic empowerment by creating new businesses or growing their current organizations.

- Philanthropy and Community Stewardship: Women learn to develop strategies to make the most effective use of the gifts of their time and money. Through partnerships with organizations such as the United Way, they engage in community grant-making initiatives.

- Connections: SCWC builds networks of women leaders by creating avenues for them to meet, discuss, and learn from each other in order to develop future opportunities for their businesses, communities, region, and state.

Women's transformational leadership is often a missed opportunity, not only in South Carolina but also throughout the United States and indeed the world. The underutilization of women's talent in the Palmetto State has social and political implications but also comes at a staggering cost economically. For example, if women in South Carolina participated in the workforce and were paid at the same rate as men, the benefit to the state annually would be:

- \$12.7 billion in new wages earned resulting in a total economic impact of some \$16.9 billion.

- Increase in jobs of more than 144,000.
- Increase in income and sales tax revenues of \$1 billion.

Women bear a great deal of responsibility for their families' economic security; yet factors such as the wage gap, the percentage of women in lower-paying jobs, poor health and the lack of educational attainment limit their ability to ensure their families' financial well-being.

### Conclusion

Investing in the advancement of women and girls can have a substantial impact on economic growth. Empowering South Carolina's women is key to the continued development and progress of the state socially, politically, and economically. Through its programs and initiatives, SC Women's Connection employs an underinvested strategy for economic and community development—the growth and development of women leaders to address the challenges of the 21st century and beyond. 🏠

### Authors' Picks for Further Reading

Catalyst, *Expanding Opportunities for Women and Business*

📄 <http://www.catalyst.org>

Institute for Women's Policy Research

📄 <http://www.iwpr.org>

The White House Project

📄 <http://thewhitehouseproject.org>

National Center for Research on Women

📄 <http://www.ncrw.org>

SC Women's Connection

📄 <http://www.clemson.edu/scwc>

Why Women Should Rule the World by Dee Dee Myers

Closing the Gender Gap: Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World by Marie Wilson

How to Say It For Women: Communicating with Confidence and Power Using the Language of Success by Phyllis Mindell

*Women Lead the Way: Your Guide to Stepping Up to Leadership and Changing the World* by Linda Tarr-Whelan (To be released Oct. 1, 2009)

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Violence Policy Center. "When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2005 Homicide Data." Retrieved December 11, 2007 from <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2007.pdf>.

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