



The Women Economic Developers of Long Island - An enduring contribution

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By Ellen Kelly, WEDLI

Our 19th hole... is how members of the Women Economic Developers of Long Island (WEDLI) sometimes describe their organization. It was formed out of a desire to provide women executives with an organization that would serve the needs of women in top level, development-related positions on Long Island and as a network where executive women could bring resources to the table to advance specific economic development projects to promote the healthy growth of our region. Since its founding in 1984, WEDLI has provided that forum and has become an enduring status symbol for women in top level positions on Long Island.

Although the 19th hole appellation has less immediacy today because women now are playing golf and make deals on the course and off, WEDLI's expressed mission to empower women working in economic development for almost a quarter of a century, has had an ongoing impact.

One example of WEDLI's impact is its Legislative Breakfast that has taken place every May for the past eleven years. On that occasion, WEDLI convenes a panel of Long Island lawmakers from the federal, state or county government to address current economic development issues and initiatives appropriate to each level of government. It was felt that bringing together Nassau and Suffolk Counties would help to home in on issues that affect all Long Islanders. WEDLI's inaugural legislative breakfast in 1996 marked the first public forum where legislators from both Nassau and Suffolk, were brought together to address common Island-wide concerns. Attended annually by hundreds of leaders, both women and men, from the Long Island business community, this unique forum provides a vehicle for allowing our legislators to speak directly to us by answering our most pressing questions.

2007 was no exception, with the five Long Island Congressional representatives, Carolyn McCarthy, Timothy Bishop, Gary Ackerman, Steven Israel and Peter King from Long Island invited to participate. Each year, our panel moderator, Abby Kennigsberg, adjunct professor of Media Arts, CW Post Campus of LIU and founder of the Long Island Coalition for Fair Broadcasting presents the questions.

WEDLI has established a number of significant traditions, one of which is observance of March as Women's History Month. Every year a distinguished panel of top women leaders from the broad range of professions address members and guests. WEDLI has hosted Long Island's women judges, women college presidents, women entrepreneurs, women research scientists, women philanthropists, women medical professionals, top women in finance and this year, on March 13, WEDLI is hosting women in top positions in real estate development and property management with Susan Barbash, president of Barbash Associates, Karen Telegadis, senior vice president, Tritec Asset Management and Marci Skeahan, chief operating officer, T. Weiss Realty Corp.

Another notable accomplishment is WEDLI's Scholarship program, which includes the Madelyn Orsini Scholarship and the Dorothy Tripp/Sally Slacke Entrepreneurial Award. Named for deceased WEDLI members, these grants are fully funded by donations from members and are awarded to outstanding women working toward a particular degree, or to an entrepreneur with successfully demonstrated potential and a particular project in need of funding.

In 2007 Stony Brook resident, Michelle Davis, was named winner of the Madelyn Orsini scholarship by The Women Economic Developers of Long Island. Davis, whose GPA is 3.9, will complete her undergraduate career in '07/'08 as a senior at Marist College where her major is biology with a minor in psychology. Her goal is to obtain a PhD in the subject area of gene therapy. Michelle took part in the Undergraduate Summer Research Program through Stony Brook University's Department of Molecular Genetics and Microbiology.

2007 winner of the Tripp/Slacke scholarship award for entrepreneurial excellence was Baldwin business owner, Gwen Jackson, owner of Florosa Homework Center, an establishment that provides academic support to students in grades K-12. The center assists students from villages such as Freeport, Roosevelt and Hempstead as well as Baldwin, individually and in small groups, with homework and private tutoring in all subjects. No student is ever turned away due to inability to pay.

At its breakfast meetings held on the second Thursday from September through May at The Woodlands in Woodbury, WEDLI informs and stimulates its constituency by addressing Long Island's most pressing issues. Authoritative individuals speak to WEDLI members and guests on topics such as transportation, energy, technology, housing, tourism and resources, water, land use and the environment.

WEDLI's limited membership comes from Long Island's highest decision-makers in the fields of economic development accounting, banking, community development, finance, commercial real estate, real estate development, marketing, higher education, government and law.

WEDLI has made an enduring and indelible contribution to the women of Long Island throughout its 24-year history, including serving as one of the three founding organizations of the Long Island Women's Agenda in 1998. WEDLI, as an organization, elevates all Long Island women in its increasingly women-empowered climate. Through its goals, programs and scholarships, and the stellar example set by its members, WEDLI represents a paradigm to which every woman can aspire. Women need role models to help them set the bar of their success higher and higher. WEDLI provides the standard.

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