

Forward View: Women, Work, and Wages

Last month, the Santa Barbara Commission for Women, in partnership with the Santa Maria and Lompoc Vandenberg branches of the American Association of University Women, sponsored a panel discussion entitled “Women, Work and Wages: Empowering Today’s Women in the Workplace”.

Moderator Jennifer Dolan described the multi-faceted role of women in today’s world: caregiver, mother, sister, daughter, primary wage earner, etc. She commented that women, as they juggle all these roles, often find themselves in transition and/or at professional crossroads.

The first panelist, Kelly Jenkins-Pultz from the United States Department of Labor office in San Diego, traveled to Santa Barbara County for this event thanks to a Leader on Loan grant from the California office of AAUW. Ms. Jenkins Pultz described the role of the federal Women’s Bureau.

According to a survey done recently by the Women’s Bureau, the high priorities for women workers are improving work/life balance, having financial security, and having some flexibility in work schedules. She reminded the audience that 75% of all women work out of the home, to include 55% of mothers with children one year or younger and 60% of mothers with children five and over.

Although the wage gap has improved from 59 cents in the 1970s to 78 cents today, this gap greatly influences women’s financial life. Since women often earn less than their male counterparts, they have less going into retirement. In Santa Barbara County, she found that the wage gap is smaller; women here earn 88% of men. Unfortunately, the reason lies in the fact that men in Santa Barbara County earn less than the California average.

Looking at other statistics, women get equal pay in only five of the 500 occupations listed at the BOL. So why the pay gap? Experts look at some possible reasons, such as occupational choices, more women working in the public and non-profit fields, and women taking time off for children and family responsibilities.

Pultz offered several suggestions to her audience. First, get into jobs that have higher starting salaries. She recommended that women research where the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act monies will be spent. Santa Barbara County will be getting \$3.7 million and most of this is supposed to go into ‘green’ jobs. She mentioned ‘energy auditing’ as a wide open field.

Ms. Pultz recommended women find a mentor, think about getting into math and science fields, and look at non-traditional careers. She encouraged the audience to consider jobs that are unionized and to learn how to negotiate for salary increases. She recommended women go to www.dol.gov/wb and visit the link “Wise Up Women” to get advice about money management. She also recommended www.careervoyages.com

Other panelists included Angel Cottrell from Women's Economic Ventures, Maria Fabula from the Non-profit Support Center, and Eleanor Snowden with the Allen Hancock Career Center. Ms. Fabula commented that there are 252 non-profit groups in the Lompoc Valley and these are often hiring. Ms. Snowden announced that the pharmacy tech program will be reopening at the Lompoc campus. AHC is also looking for volunteers to serve on an advisory committee for their career center. These groups offer extensive information and links on their websites.

Locally, women have several resources available. Under the umbrella of the Lompoc Chamber of Commerce, women in business can network through the Young Professional Group or Lompoc Connect. The Lompoc Business Women's Network meets twice monthly and also offers the opportunity to network and find a mentor. Any woman who is planning to return to school to obtain new career skills might consider applying for a scholarship through the Lompoc Valley Women in Chambers.

The panel was taped by GATV and will be shown at various times during the upcoming months. You may also obtain a copy of the tape from the office of the Commission for Women at 568-3410.