

Wisconsin lags behind other states in women's earnings

Post-Crescent, The (Appleton, WI) - April 28, 2004

Author: MaryBeth Matzek, P-C assistant business editor

GRAND CHUTE -- When it comes to finances, education and jobs, women often linger on the losing side of the equation. When comparing Wisconsin to other states, the Badger State ranks 24th in women's median earnings, 39th in comparing men's and women's wages, and 29th for the number of women in managerial or professional occupations.

That was the news greeting about 30 women who attended Tuesday's educational forum on "Wisconsin Women...Employment, Education and Earnings," which was held at the Girl Scout Program Center.

"It's stunning when you put all those numbers out there. But when you're comparing apples to apples, women in the Fox Cities get 69.8 cents for every \$1 made by a man," said Carolyn Grady, the national president of Business and Professional Women and an Oshkosh business owner.

The event is the second of four forums being held by the **Women's Fund** of the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region Inc. on the Status of Women in Wisconsin Report.

Grady was joined on a panel that also included Terry Ludeman, the chief economist with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, and Sandi Moore, student services counselor and coordinator of the Women's Educational Bureau at Fox Valley Technical College.

The "brain drain" -- people born and educated in Wisconsin who leave the state to find jobs elsewhere -- presents a huge challenge facing the state since these people are often employed in higher-paying jobs, Ludeman said.

"We have to find a way to keep these people -- especially young women -- in Wisconsin. When young women leave for dynamic metro areas like Chicago or Minneapolis, they take with them not only their jobs and education, but also our future frankly," he said. "We need to engage women in entrepreneurial and other economic development areas. We need to take these young women into account or else the state will lose out."

Always strong in manufacturing, Wisconsin's economy needs to adjust now that those high-paying jobs are leaving, Ludeman added. He predicted strong growth in the service sector -- especially health care -- since the demand in those areas will increase as the population ages.

"Manufacturing jobs may be on the downswing, but we have seen a tremendous

growth in the number of jobs out there -- almost 42,000 jobs per year. Most of those jobs are in the service industry, which may be good news for women since they are more often employed there rather than in manufacturing," he said.

However, those service jobs don't pay the same as the jobs exiting the state, which is bad news for women and men, Grady said.

"We have seen the wage gap close a bit between men and women, but a lot of that is because men are losing their earning power since these high-paying manufacturing jobs are disappearing," she said. "We need to focus on achieving pay equity for men and women who do the same job and how we value the work people do."

Moore, who works with displaced homemakers at Fox Valley Technical College, said many women undervalue the importance of education and its link to their earning potential.

"I meet with a lot of women who come in and are just lost. We work with them on educating themselves and finding a job that will support themselves -- and often their children, too," she said.

By furthering their education, Moore said women can increase their earnings potential. She pointed out that there was a \$20,000 wage gap per year between high school dropouts and those with bachelor's degrees.

"We have to stress the importance of education to our girls early, and if possible, try to steer them into what maybe non-traditional jobs that in the end provide a higher salary," Moore said.

Section: *region and state*

Page: *05C*

Record Number: *app51101315*

Copyright (c) The Post-Crescent. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.