

Toran Builds Support for Women, Minorities

Communities Benefit When Women and Minority Entrepreneurs Have Access to Business Related-Resources, Specialized Training and Finances

MICHAEL LEIGHTON
PORTLAND OBSERVER

Embracing diversity in business is a win-win proposition, according to Oregon business and civic leader Kay Toran.

As president and chief executive officer of Volunteers of America of Oregon and a long-time public servant, Toran sees how communities benefit when women and minority entrepreneurs have access to business related-resources, specialized training and finances.

In the last 20 years, many women and minority-owned businesses have achieved success, but it's a struggle that must be pursued.

"Policy matters, our elected offices matter," Toran said.

Toran said our community benefits when there's support for adventurous, creative people who traditionally have not had access to economic power.

"New minority entrepreneurs, for example, analyze markets differently and can better meet consumer demands", Toran said.



Kay Toran at the administrative building Volunteers of America of Oregon

She explained that the infusion of businessmen and women with different perspectives not only builds a stronger economy but, "it's an economy that embraces everyone."

Toran commented about the prosperous economy we're in right now makes it better for the risk takers who start new businesses. That gives women and minorities a strong market to test their ideas.

"The economy also puts more venture capitalists in the market as potential partners for women and minority owned businesses," Toran said.

Toran is an advocate for empowering the individual through collaboration and cooperation.

Her initiatives in support of women in the business world include the Volunteers of America's Standing for Children program, which taps community sponsorships to provide day care to children from low-income families.

She has worked to improve health-care benefits for employees and formed a multi-agency

partnership to keep kids from dropping out of school.

Toran is president of the national Madam C.J. Walker Institute, named after the first African-American millionaire. The organization concentrates on professional leadership training and networking.

Toran has always had an interest in business and public service.

Her parents founded Dean's Beauty Shop in northeast Portland, the oldest black-owned business in the state of Oregon.

She credits her parents for giving her business savvy, but also their missionary values in pursuing a career in public service.

As the former director of the state of Oregon's Services to Children and Families, Toran pushed through the largest budget increase in the department's history, adding 160 workers.

At Volunteers of America, her goal is to make a \$16 million dollar agency sound fiscally, so that it can continue to deliver quality services from the youngest child to the oldest adult.

And the Astra Award Winner is...

Outstanding Women Executives Honored

Five outstanding Oregon women executives will be honored for their business acumen and accomplishments at the Fifth Annual Astra awards, taking place at the Oregon Convention Center at

noon on Friday, October 6, 2000.

The awards ceremony is the centerpiece of Empowerment 2000, Astra Society International's first-ever Business Expo and Conference for Women.

The day-long conference is targeted to women business owners, executives and middle managers. It features a full floor of exhibitors and 13 national speakers, providing women the opportunity to pick up the latest professional tips, tools and techniques while mak-

ing connections with other successful women in a supportive community of peers.

Astra Society International, based in Portland, Oregon, is a non-profit organization of women business owners, and executives working to increase economic and professional opportunities for women. Membership is open to women interested in expanding their sphere of influence and wanting mentorship and support in their business or career.

The organization takes its name from the Latin *Ad Astra per Aspera*, which means, "Rising to the Stars Through Difficulties."

The Astra Awards were created in 1996 to turn a public spotlight on the accomplishments of women in business.

Over the last four years, 40 women have received the award, for their business acumen in such arenas as international trade, strategic alliance development, and employee empowerment.



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