



Women's Empowerment International

MAY 2011

Calendar

WE's 2011 Annual Meeting
Star Center Cooking Classes
WomensTrust
Adelante
Refugee day
Sonora
WE yoga
Makeover
Volunteers
Credit card
Scrapbook from IWD event

WE'S 2011 ANNUAL MEETING

Please join us **Sunday, June 5** from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Program begins at 2:15 p.m. Reception follows.

Hear Dana Dakin, founder of WomensTrust, speak about the women of Pokuase, Ghana and our new partnership. Enjoy appetizers from Ghana created by WE STAR Center client Olivia Laryea and learn about her refugee journey from Ghana to San Diego.

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STAR CENTER COOKING CLASSES LAUNCH WITH A TASTE OF AFRICA

In honor of the fifth anniversary of the WE Center for STAR Women, WE is pleased to announce the first STAR Center cooking classes.

STAR Center clients and chefs Hasno Ali, of Somalia, and Olivia Larynea, of Ghana, will teach two classes each in the foods of their home countries. The setting will be the Center for a Healthy Lifestyle, a sunny yellow cottage with an

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WE UPCOMING EVENTS

Sundays in May – “Generosity Sundays” benefitting WE, First Unitarian Universalist Church

May 10 – Pilot Microfinance Educational Program

May 19 – Board Meeting

***June 5** – Annual Meeting, 2 to 4 p.m., Marina Village Conference Center, featuring Dana Dakin, founder of WomensTrust

June 11 – WE STAR Center tour with

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organic garden and modern cooking class kitchen in Solana Beach.

“Taste of Africa” classes will include printed recipes, samples of all the foods prepared and light refreshments. All proceeds benefit the STAR Center, WE’s one-stop business incubator for refugee women in City Heights. The STAR Center is a partnership between WE and the International Rescue Committee.

Please select the classes of your choice and e-mail us at womens.empowerment@cox.net for more information and further details. Each class is limited to 20 participants and we expect all of them to fill quickly. Please contact us soon.

Thank you to our sponsors: Greg Block, Kelly and Christopher Conner, Bob Dudley and Sheila Holdway of Aztec Insurance

July 10, 2011 –

WEST AFRICA WITH OLIVIA

(same class repeated twice)

- Morning ~ 10 a.m. to noon
- Afternoon ~ 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

July 17, 2011 –

EAST AFRICA WITH HASNO

(same class repeated twice)

- Morning ~ 10 a.m. to noon
- Afternoon ~ 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Suggested donation for one class:
\$50 members/\$60 nonmembers

Suggested donation for two classes:
\$90 members/\$110 nonmembers

All donations are tax deductible. WE is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

The Center for a Healthy Lifestyle is located at 533 Lomas Santa Fe Dr., Solana Beach, 92075.

Be the first to view our beautiful new WE video. Enjoy fellowship, wine, cheese and chocolate with WE supporters.

Marina Village Conference Center, Anchor Room

1936 Quivira Way, San Diego, CA 92109

RSVP by June 1 at 858-486-6466 or womens.empowerment@cox.net

All are welcome.

First Unitarian Universalist Church

June 16 – Board Meeting

***June 19 – World Refugee Day** celebration at Museum of Photographic Arts

***July 10/17 – “Taste of Africa” - STAR Cooking Classes** at Center for a Healthy Lifestyle, Solana Beach

Sept. 2 – Site visit to WomensTrust in Ghana, led by Sandy Hoover

*Further details in this newsletter

PASSING EMPOWERMENT ON

An interview with Dana Dakin, founder of WomensTrust, WE's partner in Ghana

Question: What led you to found WomensTrust in Ghana?

Answer: I founded WomensTrust to celebrate turning 60. I had been lucky in my work, had already simplified my life by downsizing my business and moving to New Hampshire, and wanted to give back.



Please join us Sunday, June 5 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Marina Village Conference Center on Mission Bay to hear Dana Dakin speak about how microlending and related programs make a difference for poor women in Ghana.

Community volunteering did not appeal to me probably because I had my own creative agency for many years. Also, I had a huge exploration side in me that eagerly awaited more discoveries. Finally, I wanted to make the world a more equitable place, to achieve impact in a personal way. I believed the world would change if women could create community beyond the geographic norms.

In 2003, I headed to Africa to find a village and start a microlending program. I chose Ghana because it was known to have a stable democracy and English was the spoken language. Thanks to a random contact, I ended up in Pokuase, a 20,000-person town outside the capital of Accra.

By taking our time and not rushing in with easy answers, we began to create a process that extended beyond short term projects, with a longer time horizon that would allow for greater sustainability and impact. With continued visits to Pokuase, we were able to put resources in the hands of good people and watched a community shift in power and gradually evolve.

Question: What personal satisfaction do you find in your work?

Answer: Grinding poverty perpetuates a culture of “no, you can’t” with very little transparency, a dysfunctional bureaucracy, almost nonexistent funds that reach the neediest, a lack of accountability, and hopelessness.

Changing the dynamics of poverty requires instilling a culture of problem-solving. WomensTrust, in its patient way, has become a hub for “yes” in the

town. Our model integrates and adjusts in relation to evolving needs – this is why Bill Easterly, the NYU proponent for bottom-up aid, called WomensTrust “probably the best project I’ve seen in Africa.”

WomensTrust takes a holistic approach to microlending and development, and one example of our problem-solving is making computer classes for girls a reality. The Ghanaian national exam now tests for computer acumen, yet not one computer existed in public schools for hands-on training within the town of Pokuase. No money, no place, no reliable equipment, no teacher. So, we hand-carried 20 laptops with advance assurance from the town authorities that we could teach classes in the one coveted community room. We hired a competent teacher and use our small office to store and charge the computers. It’s standing-room only.

Stories and solutions like this give me genuine personal fulfillment.

Question: How do you hope your example might inspire others?

Answer: WomensTrust is in a prime spot to share lessons learned. In less than 700 days, I will turn 70 and intend to turn to the second half of our mission: “to inspire others to do the same elsewhere.”

I believe we are part of an unstoppable movement toward global women’s empowerment that is based on “passing empowerment on.” We can achieve huge impact by staying small and personal.

The process WE International used to invite WomensTrust to the funding table is a perfect example of passing along empowerment. WE vetted us, respected us, and understood our potential. WE helped us believe in ourselves. It’s exactly what we do in Pokuase, Ghana, and – thankfully – the cycle continues.

Introducing the New Executive Director at WomensTrust

Wilma Longdon became WomensTrust’s Executive Director in Pokuase, Ghana, on February 1. A project management professional with a graduate degree, Wilma has extensive experience in banking and information systems technology with the Ecobank, one of the largest full-service commercial banks in West Africa. Creative, proactive, results-driven and entrepreneurial in spirit, Wilma is an excellent communicator and strong manager.

WomensTrust and WE are fortunate that Wilma decided to follow her heart and make a career change to the non-profit world so she could directly contribute to improving the lives of women in Africa. We will feature Wilma in a future WE newsletter and are hoping she will be able to join us at a WE event in the future.

WITNESSING THE COMMITMENT OF POOR WOMEN IN HONDURAS

Last month, Wendy Haydon visited Adelante Foundation in Honduras, accompanied by fellow WE members Kathy and John Romine, their son James, and José Angel Nuncio, WE's liaison to Adelante. Following is Wendy's chronicle of the second day of the visit, when the group spent time with many microlending borrowers – women, who in her words, “are proud, courageous, determined and committed to supporting themselves and improving the lives of their families.”



The women from an assembly in Ologoci review their loan documents. Photo by José Angel Nuncio

By Wendy Haydon

The day started early. Our first stop was Adelante's office in Intibucá. The office was compact and well laid out, with friendly and efficient staff. We were shown the many educational charts that Adelante has developed to use as teaching tools at the bi-weekly assemblies. The charts addressed numerous topics, ranging from business to public health. The lesson that would be taught at each of the assemblies that day was regarding group solidarity (*solidaridad*). The concept of solidarity in the group loan means that although each woman in a group receives an amount for herself, the entire group is responsible for paying the loan, so they back each other up.

We drove to the village of Santa Catarina. It was a large assembly – 22 women attending out of 30. The meeting was held in the village's community center. Adelante staff presided over the group, introduced us, and each of us stood and greeted the group in Spanish! My Spanish is not strong, so I was thankful for the people who were my translators. This assembly was on its eighth loan cycle, and had a good payment record. It was a very enthusiastic group, with lots of hands clapping. A little girl asked

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me, “Cómo se llama?”, and I replied, “me llamo Wendy”. She told me her name was Bella! She was sweet.

Women explained what their businesses were: making clothes, tamales, bread, doughnuts, tortillas and chips; raising and selling chickens; selling cosmetics; having a small convenience store (pulpería). One woman expressed her gratitude. She indicated that she was too sick to make and sell her tortillas. The loan made it possible for her to buy a cow and chickens. She has managed to save some money and invest in her business.

At this and other assemblies, our WE group leader, José, stood and read in Spanish several messages to the Adelante clients that were written by WE members and donors. The women seemed to appreciate the messages, which were encouraging, respectful and included well-wishes.

Adelante staff read the promissory note for the 18,000 Lempira (about \$950) group loan. All women agreed to the loan terms and signed the papers. At the end of the meeting, the ladies stood and chanted the Adelante motto three times, and we joined in: Unity, Discipline, Hard Work and Courage (Unidad, Disciplina, Trabajo y Valor). This is our way of life (Esta es nuestra forma de vida). I was proud to take part.

We drove to the village of Buena Vista, to an assembly held in a member’s house with a dirt floor and an attached pulpería. About 20 women were present, with several children. A little boy who works for his mom represented her. Because it had lost some of members, this assembly didn’t qualify for a new, lower interest rate incentive. But they had recently added some new members, and were hoping to get the lower interest rate for their next loan cycle. These women sell bread, rice, tamales, doughnuts and juices.

Our third assembly was located in Ologoci, a more rural area, and was held outside under a tree at a member’s adobe home construction site. The meeting included introductions, with each member indicating what she sells (bread, tamales, enchiladas), the solidaridad educational presentation, and the Adelante motto. Because the assembly was small – only two groups of four women - Adelante staff suggested the women combine with another assembly to take advantage of the low interest incentives. The women expressed concerns about the other assembly and the longer walk to meetings.

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We finished the day at a more remote Ologoci assembly that was made up of three groups with 14 members, but only half were present. The women sold tamales, tortillas, bread, grain and enchiladas. Morale in this assembly appeared very low and several members were behind on their payments. It was clear this assembly was struggling. Staff listened as some members voiced frustration with their credit officer. Upon later discussion by Adelante management and the credit officer, the assembly was reassigned to Branch Manager Ethel Mejía for rebuilding and the credit officer's resignation was accepted.

Visiting four assemblies was a full day filled with both happiness and sadness. I felt happiness that these women are willing to work so hard to have a better life and set good examples for their many young children. I felt happy that Adelante is providing a unique funding option to them. I felt proud to be representing WE, which is doing good for others who are less fortunate.

I also felt extreme sadness to see poverty firsthand. We read about poor conditions in developing countries and hear about it on the news, but seeing it firsthand was a wakeup call to the vast differences in the way people live in this one, big world that we share, and what is considered acceptable. I couldn't help thinking how unfair it is. I wondered if the women looked at us as "rich American tourists" with resentment. I hoped not. I certainly didn't feel resentment from them. I felt their inner strength and gratitude as I shook their hands, and I wanted so much to convey my respect for them.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY CELEBRATION

Meet your neighbor and celebrate San Diego's diversity with Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Don Bartletti and local photography heroes Sam Hodgson and Roberto "Bear" Guerra. The first annual World Refugee Day, sponsored by the San Diego Refugee Forum, will take place Sunday, June 19, from 1 p.m to 6 p.m. at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego.

The event will also feature fantastic food by WE STAR Center clients representing various refugee cuisines, the US premiere of "Where We Live," a documentary by award-winning Iraqi director Fady Hadid, vivid video installations, and inspiring discussions. Bob Montgomery, director of the International Rescue Committee in San Diego, will also speak. Representatives from the region's refugee-serving organizations, including WE, will be there, as well as members of the various refugee communities. The event is free and includes access to the museum's regular galleries.

For more information:
<http://www.facebook.com/SDRefugeeForum>



WE Ambassadors Jenna Tatum, left, and Kristen Kuriga, right, with Magda Aurelia Medina Valencia, whose jewelry business has allowed her to put herself through a local university. Photo by Linda Corey

WOMEN SOAR LIKE EAGLES IN SONORA

By Jenna Tatum

Two years ago, my mother, Linda Weber, embarked on a trip to Sonora, Mexico to visit WE's community partner organization, Grameen de la Frontera. When she returned, my mother immediately called to tell me the inspiring stories of the women she had met, and concluded that microfinance loans for women are the key to tackling global poverty. I was living in Washington, D.C. at the time, but when I moved back to San Diego this year, I remembered this resounding endorsement of WE and decided I wanted to get more involved.

Last month, I joined Linda Corey, Chris Khoury, Carol Breckenridge and Kristen Kuriga on the same trip to Sonora, Mexico to visit Grameen de la Frontera. We visited five "ejidos," or villages, and spoke with dozens of women who had started small businesses, ranging from breeding and selling goats to running grocery stores out of their homes.

What struck me most about our conversations was that many women described

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how the loans changed “la comunidad,” or the community. One of these women was Magda Aurelia Medina Valencia, who told us how the program had changed the status of the women in her community and had greatly improved the women’s “amor propia,” or self-esteem. Magda Aurelia, a confident young woman in her early 20s, was herself an embodiment of this change: her business selling jewelry has allowed her to put herself through college, where she is studying to teach the native Yaqui language as an elementary school teacher. She told us her dream is to keep her community moving forward while still preserving her native culture, striking a deliberate balance between her vision of progress for the future and a respect for the ways of the past.

Later, Kristen and I chatted with Maria Inez Garcia Mariscal, the director of Grameen de la Frontera’s new Social Services program, about these changes taking place in the community. Maria

“...the key is to change the collective thinking about the role of women in the community by first changing how the women think about themselves.”

Maria Inez Garcia Mariscal,
director of Grameen de la Frontera’s new Social Services program

Inez told us that Grameen had allowed more women like Magda Aurelia to learn to see themselves as valued and capable of changing their own lives. In a place where domestic violence and the denigration of women are still common, the key, she told us, is to change the collective thinking about the role of women in the community by first changing how the women think about themselves.

My conversation with Maria Inez opened my eyes to the real potential of Grameen de la Frontera, and why my mother was so enthusiastic about her trip to Sonora two years ago. Grameen has done more than help women lift themselves out of poverty; it has helped raise a new generation of women who are empowered and ready to take ownership of the future.

I was reminded of a motivational talk that one of Grameen’s loan officers, Abram Jacobi, had given to the women at a meeting we visited. He used a parable of a duck and an eagle: the duck never planned for anything, while the eagle soared high in the sky, always planning and watching out for new opportunities. He told the women to remember this story as they embraced the challenges of running their businesses, and to always strive to be an eagle, “un aguila.”

With the help of Grameen de la Frontera, I believe there will be many more eagles flying in the skies over Sonora, Mexico.

YOGA AND WE CONNECT

This spring two WE Yoga Giving Circles formed to practice yoga with Rose Lochmann, registered nurse and certified yoga teacher. All proceeds go to Women's Empowerment.

Last fall, WE member Mary Rutland gave Rose a book to read, "Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide." Rose was moved by that book to learn more about Women's Empowerment and so she accepted an invitation from Linda Corey to attend a WE Introductory group at the home of Christy Hendrickson. Inspired by the WE mission and accomplishments, Rose reflected on what she could do to make a difference.

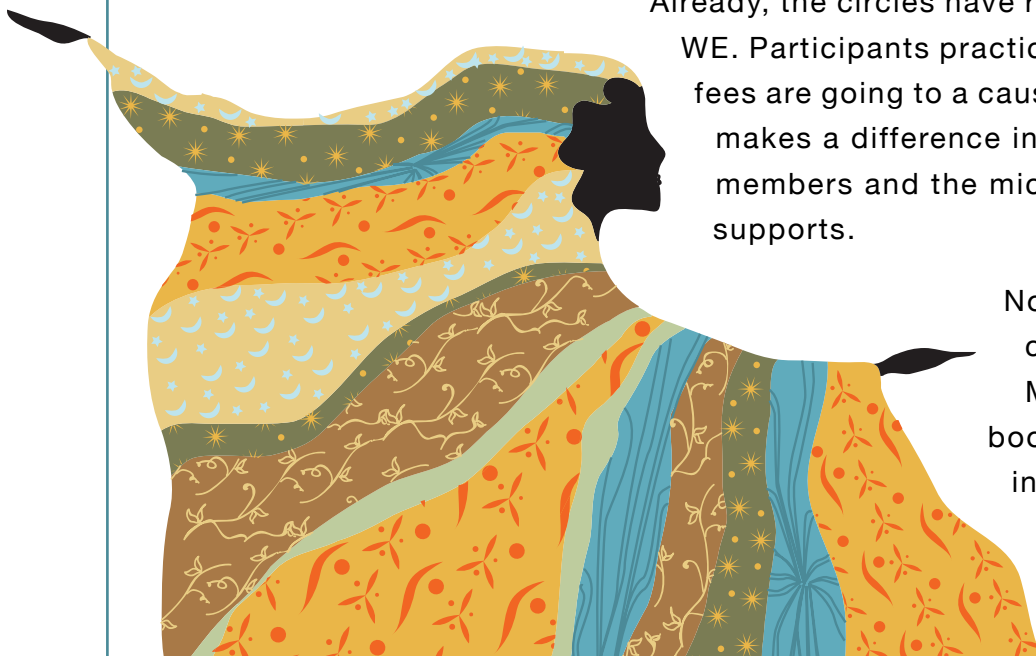
Rose has been doing yoga for 25 years and recently became certified as a Yoga Alliance teacher. Wanting to share the benefits of yoga with others, she decided to create a philanthropic yoga organization named The Yoga Difference with the mission to "offer the service of yoga to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, communities, and the world." The proceeds from The Yoga Difference are used to support organizations committed to helping reduce the oppression of women by supporting education, health services and micro loans to women in developing countries.

The fit between the missions of WE and The Yoga Difference was immediately apparent. Rose offered to start three WE Yoga Giving Circles in 2011. Two have formed, one in Solana Beach and another in Escondido, hosted by Janie Meyers. Participants are asked to donate \$100 for a series of six classes.

Already, the circles have raised over \$1,000 for WE. Participants practice yoga knowing their fees are going to a cause they support. This makes a difference in both the lives of WE members and the microfinance clients WE supports.

Notice the inter-connections involved. Mary gives Rose a book to read as Linda invites her to a WE

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The Solana Beach Yoga Circle practices poses and makes a difference. Left to right, Rose Lochmann, Felice Grace, Linda Corey, Mary Rutland. Missing member is Lucy Khoury. Photo by Micky Newhouse

group that Christy is hosting. From these meaningful coincidences, WE Yoga Circles emerge and Janie decides to host one. This sharing is what happens among us in San Diego and in our programs in City Heights, Sonora, Honduras, and now Ghana. We are linked in surprising ways and each positive action we take results in effects we can't predict.

The story of the WE Yoga Circles inspires each of us to think about the unique ways in which we may contribute. We each have special talents, gifts, skills we might share with others to further a purpose larger than ourselves and embodied in WE. Sharing a book, a meal, a class can make a difference in our world.

If you would like to host a WE Yoga Circle, contact Rose Lochmann, The Yoga Difference, at rlochmann@att.net or 858-735-6692.

And our deep gratitude to Rose for her generous heart and support.



A VOLUNTEER CREATES A GIFT SHOP MAKEOVER

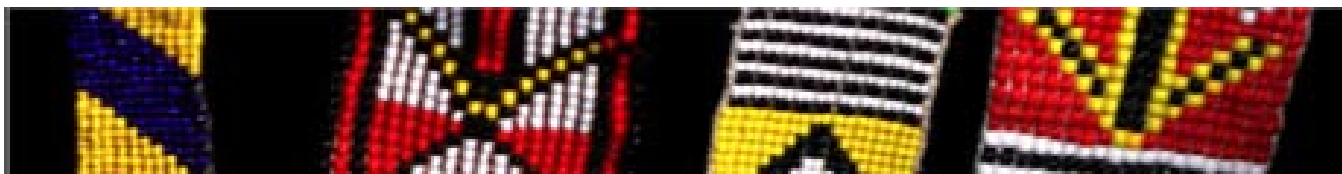
Nadia Azhaer arrived in the United States from Ethiopia twelve years ago. With the help of the WE Center for STAR Women, she became proprietor of a gift shop in the Sheraton Hotel on A Street in downtown San Diego three years ago. She recently asked the Star Center for help selecting and displaying the shop's merchandise.

WE Volunteer Terri Wise, owner of Interior Makeovers (www.interiormakeoversbyterri.com), graciously assisted with the project. Her energetic and creative approach produced immediate eye-catching results. Terri removed items from shelves and rearranged them in attractive groupings and created ensembles with dresses, hats, jewelry and purses. She consolidated other displays to allow for a more attractive and spacious entry to the shop. Nadia expressed delight with the changes.

We are so grateful to Terri for the generous gift of her time and expertise.

Gail White and Mary Rutland, both volunteers with WE's Business Development Committee, continue to work with Nadia on other aspects of merchandising and display, incorporating suggestions made at the time of Terri's work in the gift shop.

If you have skills that might help STAR Center entrepreneurs, please contact us at womens.empowerment@cox.net. Even a few hours can make an enormous difference.



JOIN THE FUN. VOLUNTEER

Volunteering with WE is fun and rewarding work! Below are some of our current needs. Please consider giving a few hours of your time to help us reach our goals.

- Our membership, fundraising and marketing committees need additional members. All have a variety of tasks; some are generated from committee meetings, while others can be done at home on our own time.
- Our thank you letter writing committee needs a volunteer to share this work. You work from home and all supplies are provided. The time commitment varies, depending on the time of year.
- WE needs volunteers to donate fruit, cheese/cracker or dessert trays for our annual meeting, Sunday, June 5. Please let us know if you would be willing to bring a tray to serve 20.
- If you have administrative skills, knowledge of Constant Contact and/or Mail Merge – or would be willing to learn - we could use your help. We are setting up an administrative committee to help us streamline our email communication and tasks related to events. Even a few hours a month could make a big difference!

Contact Joan Rovegno, Volunteer Coordinator, for more details. (858) 509-2716; joan.rovegno@gmail.com.

A NEW CREDIT CARD OPTION

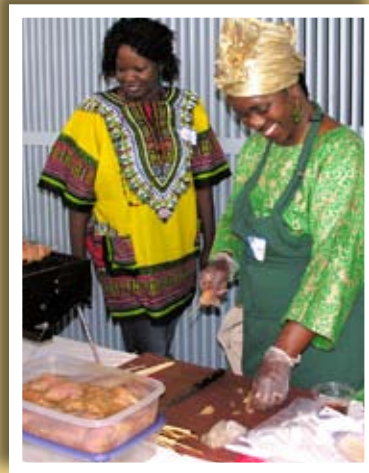
WE is pleased to announce that we can now accept donations via all major credit and debit cards (Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express). This represents an important step forward in our efforts to help you help others. Our new system avoids the high processing costs traditionally associated with credit and debit card transactions. Even better, our new credit card processor doesn't charge a monthly minimum fee or require a long term contract. This processor charges 2.75 percent of a donation when the credit/debit card is present, or 3.15 percent plus 15 cents for each transaction completed when the credit card is not present.

With these very reasonable rates, we can now offer you three convenient ways to support impoverished women in Mexico, Honduras, Ghana, and here in San Diego: You can donate via PayPal on our website, www.womenempowerment.org ; you can write a check; or you can authorize a credit/debit card donation on your charge card.

Once again, thanks for all you do to support WE and the women WE serves.

WE SUPPORTERS ATTEND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

There were cooking demonstrations, yogurt making, a festive STAR Center Bazaar and new information on microfinance in San Diego and aboard at the first annual WE International Day Celebration at UCSD's International House.



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- **Winifred Cox** - co-founder and co-President
- **Leigh Fenly** - co-founder and co-President
- **Meg Bouher** - Membership Chair
- **Carol Clause** - Secretary
- **Mary Cutchin** - STAR Center liaison
- **Jean Fort** - MFI Relationships, Research and Education Chair
- **Rhea Kuhlman** - Treasurer
- **José Nuncio** - Finance Chair and Adelante liaison
- **Margie Pryatel** - Education Curriculum Director
- **Loretta Smith** - Director of Administration
- **Sherry Risch** - General Board Director
- **Joan Rovegno** - Volunteer Chair



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