



LOCAL

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Grants given to groups supporting women

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A Fund for Women unveiled \$100,000 in grants for local groups that support adolescent girls and victims of domestic abuse in the Madison area at its annual dinner on Wednesday. This year they also took the minds of attendees on a trip around the world in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan.

Two women's stories brought the plight of Afghan women's human rights into focus.

Mavis Leno, the keynote speaker who drew record ticket sales, keeps a less visible profile than her comedian husband, Jay Leno. But she is an outspoken critic of the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women.

"In the end, all human rights action begins at the community level," Leno, chairwoman of the Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Help Afghan Women and Girls, told the State Journal.

Leno said she was compelled to act in 1997 after hearing stories leaking out of Afghanistan of Taliban soldiers entering the operating rooms of female doctors or the classrooms of female teachers and forcing them at gunpoint to put down their scalpels or chalk, return home and cover themselves in a burqa, telling them they would never work again.

"I heard these things and felt a rush of rage," said Leno. "I finally knew what it meant to 'see red.'" Turning anger to action is the message she delivers to community groups. "If you become an activist, you also become an optimist."

The other woman whose story highlighted Afghanistan is Madison native Julia Bolz. She left a successful law practice in Seattle to help children in Afghanistan by building schools in the war-scarred country.

Bolz is one of the six women A Fund for Women is honoring as Fabulous Firsts - women highlighted as pioneers for extraordinary job and community achievements.

She was not on hand Wednesday to accept the award. Her father, well-known local philanthropists Jack Bolz, said he planned to accept on her behalf because his daughter is currently in Afghanistan, in the midst of dedicating a large, new high school.

"She began this mission raising nickels and dimes through her nieces schools in Seattle, where she lives now," Jack Bolz said. "One of her main visions, in addition to educating children, is to build bridges and friendships and to show them that Americans are not nasty people."

The other women honored as Fabulous First this year are: Tammy Baldwin as Wisconsin's first female congresswoman; pharmacist Marla Ahlgrimm as a pioneer who founded Women's Health America; Margo Melli, the first female tenure track professor at the UW Law School; Lupita Montoto as the businesswoman behind the Spanish language radio station La Movida and La Voz newspaper; and Deidre Green, a La Follette High School senior and the first student to win the Wisconsin Education Association Council's School Bell Award for her columns in the Simpson Street Free Press.

A Fund for Women donates money to local nonprofits that build opportunity and promote self-sufficiency for women. This year's grantees through the fund were the African American Ethnic Academy, \$20,000; Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, \$5,500; East Madison Community Center, \$9,500; Girl Scouts of Blackhawk Council, \$25,000; Goodman Atwood Community Center, \$15,000; Madison Children's Museum, \$5,000; and YWCA Girls Inc., \$20,000.