

# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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## Women's Fund supports nonprofits

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During times of economic downturn conventional wisdom says that charitable giving will decrease dramatically; the Women's Fund of Santa Barbara alleviated some of these concerns on Monday by presenting \$725,000 in donations to 10 local nonprofit organizations.

Representatives from the charitable organizations gathered with members of the fund at El Paseo restaurant.

"We're thrilled to award these grants to so many worthy agencies working in the areas of education, healthcare and violence prevention," said Jo Gifford, who chairs the group's oversight committee. "We feel privileged to help these agencies continue and expand their excellent work."

Nearly 98 percent of all donations go to charity, as members volunteer their time to research and select grant recipients, an advantage that the group has over conventional foundations, according to Ms. Gifford.

Dozens of candidates for grants were whittled down to a list of 14 by a committee. A December vote by fund members selected the final 10.

The group awarded its largest grant, \$150,000 to the Dos Pueblos Engineering Academy to help construct a new building for the program.

Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics, which provides healthcare to needy women, received \$80,000 to upgrade their computer system. The Breast Cancer Resource Center was awarded \$30,000.

PathPoint, a program providing housing to the mentally ill was given \$75,000, as was Casa Serena, an alcohol rehabilitation facility for women and their families.

The group also reached out to groups serving at-risk youth. United Boys & Girls Club was awarded \$80,000 to expand its after-school programs.

CORE, an intervention program for at-risk seventh- and eighth-grads students received \$70,000. AllforOne Youth and Mentoring, another program aimed at reducing gang participation, was given \$65,000; Future Leaders of America, which looks to increase civic-mindedness and leadership among Latinos, received the same amount.

Women's Fund of Santa Barbara also provided \$35,000 to the Parent Project. The money will help increase healthy communication between adults and adolescents.

The Women's Fund is the brainchild of Meredith Scott and Carol Palladini. It started five years ago with 79 members and has grown to nearly 400.

"It is amazing to see how far we have come since then," Ms. Palladini said proudly.

"Our goal is to pool our money so that we can make more of difference than any of us could as individuals," added Ms. Scott.

The organization requires a \$2,500 membership fee, although it allows women to join in groups, dividing the fee among individuals.

Patty Hopkins-Aco and Joyce Johnson joined the group this year, along with several other members of their book club, inspired by the

works of philanthropist and author Greg Mortenson.

"After reading Mortenson we decided that we should do something," said Ms. Hopkins-Aco, a special education teacher. "When we got a mailing from the Women's Fund it seemed like the perfect opportunity to give back to our local community."

"Your money goes a lot further when you consolidate it, has more of an impact," she added.

"What makes the fund unique is that if you can only afford to give \$200 to \$300 individually, it can still benefit 10 different causes that are all important."

The organization has written more than \$2.2 million in grants since 2004 with the help of the Orfalea Fund, which matches member donations.

"We were actually approached by people at the Orfalea Foundation, who said 'We like what you are doing. . .how can we help,'" said Ms. Scott.

The organization hopes to raise even more funds next year, bucking the trends of the past.

"During economic recession people tend to pull back when they are really needed more than ever," said Ms. Palladini. "As important as our contribution is, we cannot rest; at this moment we start anew in our effort to feed, house and heal women and children."

The group is already preparing for next year. Membership mailings are planned for April and donations are being accepted through Dec. 1. Interested parties can visit [www.womensfundsb.org](http://www.womensfundsb.org).

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Amir Abo-Shaeer, left, of the Dos Pueblos Engineering Academy greets Women's Fund member Parm Williams. Dr. Abo-Shaeer's nonprofit organization was awarded \$150,000 from the group, the largest of the grants given out on Monday. THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS