

Woman of Achievement 2009

Patricia A. Simmons

Pat's 40-year career began after receiving her BS-Finance degree from Colorado University. She soon became the first woman commercial loan officer at a major bank in Denver. She continued in finance and telecommunications, retiring as Associate Director of MSU's Information Technology Center. Pat has served on the boards of several non-profit organizations, always eager to advance her passions: advancement of women, politics, and the environment. She has served BPW as officer and chair at all levels over 32 years.

Helping Women and Involvement with Women's Issues. Back in the 80's Pat was involved in grant writing at MSU that benefitted women. She was a member of the newly formed MSU Affirmative Action Advisory Board and was Chair in 1982. This group provided advice to the University about better treatment of women employees and did comparable worth research about women's and men's pay on campus. Additionally Pat was on the MSU Faculty Council representing women administrators.

Pat's involvement in BPW in Montana which has continued for 30 years. Besides networking and learning leadership skills as committee chair and officer, Pat helped promote our legislative platform issues and in later years helped update the platform. Pat has also written resolutions that were adopted in the annual conventions that gave BPW specific guidance on issues to pursue in the Montana legislature, and testified, wrote letters and emails to legislators about non-gender insurance, domestic violence and pay equity. BPW's work in national legislative issues from the national offices in Washington DC has been a key reason for me being a member and she's very proud of BPW's strong advocacy for the elimination of sex discrimination in employment, the principle of equal pay, and the need for a comprehensive equal rights amendment.

As a strong supporter of legislation benefiting women, Pat joined the Montana Womens' Lobby board, after being an active member for many years, three years ago. As a joint venture with the American Association for University Women (AAUW), BPW hired a lobbyist to pursue passage of Jessica's Law (domestic violence against women), reform of pay day lending and support of pay equity. In February 2007, Pat led a group of Bozeman BPW members to Helena for International Women's Day and a capitol rally with women Legislators learning the key issues impacting women. Later that month, Pat represented Montana BPW in Washington DC at the annual Policy in Action conference by BPW. In preparation Pat researched the issues, wrote a Congressional briefing document, and after attending BPW workshops.

Pat also met personally with Senators Baucus and Tester and Congressman Rehberg's staffer encouraging them to support the Heart for Women Act, the Healthy Families Act and the Women's Retirement Security Act. In February 2009, Pat helped organize a Montana Women's Lobby Legislative day in Helena where we held educational programs and lobbied our legislators. Pat enjoyed organizing two state BPW conventions in 2008 and 2009 as President and had a wonderful team of Bozeman BPW members involved with the efforts. Her theme was "Defining and Growing Montana BPW for Tomorrow". In addition to providing awards programs for recognizing outstanding women - Young Career Woman, Woman of Achievement, and Employer of the Year Recognition, and updating bylaws, legislative platform, strategic long range plan, Pat also planned interesting speakers to educate our members.

BPW passed a resolution in 2007 while Pat was President-Elect that we would investigate combining our resources with other statewide women's organizations: Montana Women Vote, Montana Women For, AAUW, League of Women Voters, and Montana Women's Lobby. Pat organized a meeting with all these organizations in November 2007 and BPW discussed ways that we could work together such as sending emails to each other's groups, working together on voter registration, collaborate on International Women's Day, share our missions with each other, work together on issues that we plan on supporting in the Legislature.

In her working career Pat has been the first woman to hold certain positions, worked with all male leadership teams and served in the traditionally male field of telecommunications. As a result, she had the opportunity of being a role model to other women and by doing so, helped make it easier for other women to follow. As a manager of people over the years, Pat has had 5-15 people on my teams and takes pride in especially helping the women on my teams to be more successful.

Pat was often called "The Women's Libber" in here jobs (also Tree Hugger for her environmental work). *It is interesting to read her thoughts back in 1972 for her BPW Young Career Woman talk in Denver when she wrote: "Seriously, I feel that being the first woman commercial loan officer at my bank, I have to set an example. A woman must work twice as hard as*

a man with the same background and qualifications. Her work and actions will have a definite affect on other women employees who want to be promoted. I feel it's necessary to be able to discuss business with them but also be friends. In my experience, it takes a while for the men loan officers to "accept" the woman working in this traditionally-male area of business but I feel they are gradually changing."

Pat really enjoyed working on the Expanding Your Horizons in Math & Science program for around 10 years in the 1990's which we hosted at MSU. She was first involved as a Presenter, then joined the organizing committee and finally was Co-Chair of the annual conference for middle school girls with a whole new format we designed. We wanted to encourage girls to take more math and science classes so they could be qualified for a broader variety of careers. She always insisted that all the presenters be women in a range of math and science careers, so that young women would see and hear from successful women role models. She hosted over a hundred young girls each year on campus, had 30-40 women presenters, and 10-15 volunteers. She encouraged Bozeman BPW to be a sponsor of this organization, and BPW continues today as a sponsor.

Helping Candidates get elected, especially women: Pat loves supporting candidates for local, state and national office (working on committees, literature drops, yard signs, letters to the editor, talking to people door to door, financial contributions, bumper stickers, etc.). She's had the fortune to be on the candidate campaign committees for Emily Stonington Swanson for the Montana Legislature, Tracy Velazquez for Congress, Carol Stahl for County Commissioner, and Hillary Clinton for President. She has also helped many other men and women run for office, those who support equal rights for women such as Senator Tester, Senator Baucus, Congressman Pat Williams, and President Barack Obama. "I'm partial to the Democratic Party because of its platform that believes in the equality of women (and also cares about the Earth)." When she retired from MSU, one of her first goals was to get more involved with politics and she became a Precinct Woman, Secretary, and Website Coordinator of the Gallatin County Democrats organization. The GCD were very involved with helping fund Democratic candidates, providing information about the candidates to the public, and hosted a Nominating convention for the Presidential candidates in 2008.

To conclude, we quote Pat from her BPW Young Career Woman speech: *"I feel that both of these areas, minority rights and women's rights are extremely important to the business world, because without improvements, business is not and will not be efficient and in the long run, they will not be profitable. They will not be efficient or profitable if certain people are not hired because of their sex or color when they might be far more productive and intelligent than the frequently hired white male who is without the best qualifications. Each employee must make his own commitment to involve himself and his company in helping accomplish changes. This commitment then, is my responsibility to the business world."*

Pat still believes these thoughts, and they have guided much of her life.