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Kansas City Region Makes Progress to Increase Gender Diversity on Boards and in Executive Ranks

win|win Campaign Says More Work is Needed to Reach Goals by 2015

Kansas City, MO — The Kansas City region's win|win campaign, designed to move highly qualified women onto corporate boards and into executive suites, announced some positive momentum as it begins its second year into the five-year effort.

"We've seen a number of qualified women rise to executive ranks and we've applauded area corporations as they increased female representation on their boards to at least 20 percent," said Denise Kruse, CEO of AdamsGabbert, who served as chair of the win|win steering committee during the first year of the campaign. "But perhaps of equal importance, we launched a critical conversation about the importance gender diversity plays for companies looking to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace."

The win|win campaign, spearheaded by Central Exchange, was launched to increase gender diversity at the top of KC region companies and ultimately grow business. The campaign set a goal of "20 x 15," or, 20 percent of board and executive positions held by women by the year 2015.

Although women make up 47 percent of the workforce (*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010*), they represent only a small percentage of top management positions. A study conducted by the Central Exchange in 2011 found that women comprise only 7 percent of both board director and executive officer positions at the top 37 companies in the Kansas City region. More than half of the companies have no women board directors or executive officers and none has a female CEO. Kansas City lags the nation's *Fortune* 500 companies by more than 50 percent.

win|win leadership recognizes the following Kansas City organizations for selecting women to top management positions:

- Dr. Melinda Estes, new president and CEO of Saint Luke's Health System
- Mi-Ai Parrish, new president and publisher of the *Kansas City Star*
- Esther George, new president of the Kansas City Federal Reserve
- Neeli Bendapudi, new dean of the University of Kansas School of Business
- Carrie Besnette Hauser, new president and CEO of Kauffman Scholars
- Sharon Lindenbaum, new vice chancellor of finance and administration at UMKC
- Susan Ehrlich, new president of Financial Services at H&R Block
- Cindy Wallis-Lage, new president, Global Water Business at Black & Veatch
- Maria Jenks, Ellen Fairchild and Heather Humphrey, new officers at KCP&L
- H&R Block achieved 20 percent women on its board
- Euronet added a second woman to its board





“Our founding partners and member companies have locked arms with us to make the business case for gender diversity in leadership positions,” said Nancy Mellard, national leader for CBIZ Women’s Advantage and incoming chair of the win|win steering committee. “We have said all along that this isn’t a women’s issue, it’s a business issue. Gender diversity at the top of corporations has been proven to have a positive financial impact on a company.”

“H&R Block is proud of our dedication to building a diverse workforce, and that includes ensuring that qualified women have the same opportunities to advance as their male counterparts,” said Bill Cobb, president and CEO of H&R Block. “We recently achieved 20 percent female representation on our board and believe that gender diversity at all levels of our company makes good business sense.”

Gender diversity in executive ranks is correlated to growth, innovation and stronger financial results. According to Catalyst studies, Fortune 500 companies with more gender diversity among executive officers had a Return on Equity 35 percent higher than those with the least diversity.

“The win|win campaign has made great strides to inform and educate the business community about the financial benefits of gender diversity in executive leadership, but we still have work to do, said Mellard. “This is a time in our region’s history where doing the right thing intersects with a smart and successful business strategy.”

Sixty-seven companies and individuals in the Kansas City region have signed on as supporters of the win|win campaign. To help organizations develop women leaders, win|win provides a range of educational forums, services and activities designed to educate, change perceptions and create a sense of purpose among supporters.

The win|win campaign’s Connections Committee assists companies looking for qualified women for publicly-traded and privately-held (for profit) board openings. Contact winwin@centralexchange.org or call Ellen D’Amato at 816-471-7560, ext. 18 for more information.

About win|win

The win|win campaign was founded in 2009 by a coalition of Kansas City business advocates with a vision to advance the Kansas City region: Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, Kauffman Foundation, Kansas City Area Development Council, Central Exchange and UMKC – The Bloch School. For more information, and a complete list of supporters visit winwinkc.com.

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