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Pushing the Conversation on Gender Parity

The Forum of Executive Women Marks 40 Years of Advancement of Women Leaders in Philadelphia Region

Philadelphia, PA – November 25, 2017 – Forty years ago, 4,000 people marched up Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. in memory of Alice Paul, the author and chief promoter of the Equal Rights Amendment, and an activist who encouraged the spread of feminist ideas all over the world. The same year, Judith von Seldeneck and Lee van de Velde co-founded The Forum of Executive Women in Philadelphia.

“In the seventies, there were few women in leadership, and we had no support system,” says von Seldeneck, who is also Founder and Chairman of Diversified Search, headquartered in Philadelphia. “There was an obvious need and desire for successful women in the Philadelphia region to come together and take a close look at issues facing women in business.”

It was an inauspicious beginning. The bastions of the Philadelphia business community had a “No Women” policy. Undaunted, von Seldeneck made lunch reservations in her husband’s name at an all-male membership club. Heads turned when she arrived with 60 women. At that moment, the seeds were planted for The Forum of Executive Women.

“This was the first opportunity for area business women to connect, share common experiences, and start a dialogue about how to leverage their collective power to introduce and advance women into leadership roles,” says van de Velde, who built her career in executive search and organizational management.

Today, The Forum comprises more than 450 women who meet regularly to advance the opportunities of women in leadership and to drive the conversation on gender parity throughout the region. On **Thursday, December 7, 2017, the organization will commemorate 40 years of progress at Please Touch Museum** with a celebration sponsored by PNC that will include NBC10’s Tracy Davidson as emcee, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney, as well as the Forum’s pioneering co-founders and 12 other past presidents.

“While we have made significant impact, there is much to be done,” says Margaret A. McCausland, President of The Forum of Executive Women. “Last year, only five of the region’s top 100 companies were headed by a female CEO, and only 11 percent of top earners were women.”

Over the past four decades, The Forum has established initiatives that promote gender parity and advance women's leadership including:

- For the 17th year, The Forum has produced the *Women in Leadership* report to provide an important barometer for measuring progress of women leaders in the Greater Philadelphia region. See the full report here: <http://foew.com/initiatives/women-in-leadership-report/>
- In April 2017, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed an historic resolution that urges all public and private companies as well as nonprofit institutions doing business in Pennsylvania to have a minimum of 30 percent women directors by Dec. 31, 2020, and measure their progress annually toward a goal of equal representation of men and women in leadership positions. Supported by The Forum and introduced to the House of Representatives by Rep. Kate Harper (R-Montgomery), the resolution was co-sponsored by a bipartisan group of representatives from across the state and accepted by a unanimous vote of 189-0.
- Developed a robust Mentoring Program for emerging women leaders that serves to inspire the next generation.
- Created *The Forum Award* to provide professional leadership development for emerging women leaders.
- Initiated a nonprofit ally program to provide a source of talent and non-financial support, as well as networking opportunities, for a selected nonprofit organization for two consecutive years. Currently the ally partner is Girls on the Run Philadelphia.

About The Forum

Founded in 1977, The Forum of Executive Women is the region's premier women's organization, actively working to increase the number of women in leadership roles, expand their impact and influence, and position them to drive positive change in the Greater Philadelphia region. Visit www.foew.com.

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