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Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Girls Eyes Thrown Wide Open to their Possibility and Power in Running and Winning Workshop



*The Middletown Participants in the third annual **Running and Winning Workshop Leadership Program for Young Women in High School**. Picture one (left to right- Middleton North teacher Karen Carew, HSN students Brandi Calavano , Emily Sharen, Samantha Chase, Kristen Allen, Meghan Brady , Jessica Simmons, Jessica Saunders. Picture two (left to right) Middletown High School South teacher Regina Luisi, Sarah Conway, Meghan Sparacia, Alexis Briscuso, Alexandra Keenan, Corinne Clark, Jaclyn Wiener.*

On May 1st, Marian Wattenbarger, Running & Winning Steering Committee co-chairperson and AAUW member formally greeted sixty high school juniors from 12 area high schools in the Monmouth Regional High School auditorium addressing them,

“This day is about public policy—the makers and why they make it and an idea on how you can make it. Politics is about making a difference. We hope that after today you might consider running for office or working for someone on a campaign.”

The young ladies were participants in the third annual **Running and Winning Workshop Leadership Program for Young Women in High School**, which was cosponsored by a consortium of local women’s organizations including the League of Women Voters-Greater Red Bank Area (LWV-GRBA), Red Bank Chapter of Hadassah, AAUW (American Association of University Women) Northern Monmouth County Branch, Junior League of Monmouth County and the Monmouth County Regional Chapter of the Women’s Political Caucus. Individual members of the aforementioned

organizations, as well as some-local businesses and banks, were donors to the event. The donors underwrote the cost of the breakfast, lunch and well documented workbooks which each girl (and their 17 adult volunteer facilitators from the sponsor organizations) utilized as a blueprint for the day's jam-packed activities.

In preparation for the working part of the program, the sixty girls were separated from their classmates and placed in heterogeneous groups of four ~~to five~~ each working with a facilitator. Representing the Middletown township School district for the event were Brandi Calvano, *Emily Sharen*, *Samantha Chase*, *Kristen Allen*, *Meghan Brady*, *Jessica Simmons*, *Jessica Saunders* and their teacher *Karen Carew* from High School North. High School South teacher *Regina Luisi* accompanied her students *Sarah Conway*, *Meghan Sparacia*, *Alexis Briscuso*, *Alexandra Keenan*, *Corinne Clark*, *Jaclyn Wiener*. The teacher representatives also participated in the program in interviewing the women politicians and discussing the public policy subject of Immigration Reform.

Appearing upon the auditorium stage were 15 living examples of women running and winning public office including assemblywomen, freeholders, councilwomen, mayors, county clerk, county surrogate, county sheriff, representative of the office of the governor and members of local boards of education. Although the girls were given brief introductions to the female officials, they next had an opportunity to meet three officials up close and personal in fifteen minute rotated interviews within their working groups. The working groups met at separate tables outside the auditorium.

The first women Freeholder director in Monmouth County, Barbara McMorrow, dazzled the girls with her personal story and astounded them with her hectic schedule. They intently listened when she explained that as a teacher and later, the principal of Howell High School (the kind of principal that goes to every event,) she had no interest whatsoever in running for public office. After she retired, she had been entreated by mayors, US Senators and Congressmen to convince her to run on the Democratic ticket. She finally agreed when they hit her soft spot, explaining, that as a public official she could really do things to help the kids. She campaigned in 53 towns and lost. The next year, when she was asked to reprise her effort she declined until she ran into a former student in a store who asked her if she was going to run again.

She told the girls, "She looked me in the eye and told me, 'You would never let us quit.' So because of that encounter with a former student I ran again, but my way. No negative campaigning. I told them (party organizers), I am not running for the party. I am running for the people."

The ladies in government gave the girls a crash course in running a campaign and governing. Sharon Lee, the first African American council women from Red Bank also shared her views on the topic of the day's exercise on Immigration Reform. She explained to the girls that Red Bank is a perfect location for an immigrant population with its multiple forms of public transportation, inexpensive housing, churches and clinics. She gave them a bit of insight on the problems of immigration when people who fear the law because of their legal status would be hesitant to seek the protection of the law even when they are being abused by people breaking it.

Middletown High School North junior Emily Scharen reflected on that portion of the program, "I thought the women in government were very powerful, and how much they achieved was just awesome. Guys always kid girls that they are better than we are. But those women had jobs, families and held office. That is pretty powerful."

The interview with the politicians who successfully ran and won office provided a helpful prelude to the main activity of the workshop—simulating a political campaign. Utilizing background information in their workbooks, each girl choose a role to play in a working political team as either campaign manager, publicist, speech writer or candidate. Together the team brainstormed the pros and cons on the contentious campaign issue of Immigration Reform. During a two-hour time frame, which included a working lunch, they staked out a position, wrote a speech, developed a slogan and created a campaign poster promoting that slogan. The entire group then reassembled in the auditorium where their slogans were projected on a large screen and their campaign posters where displayed. One by one, the

fifteen teams took the podium. Flanked by her campaign teammates, each candidate delivered her political speech on Immigration Reform.

Slogans like *Who Limited the American Dream? Overworked and Unspoken, Let Freedom R.I.N.G. (Regulate Immigration for National Growth), Too Small to Hold All, If Your Citizenship is Earned, We won't be Stern*, represented divergent views on how to legalize immigrants. However, there was a total consensus that Immigration Reform was needed and that doing nothing was not an option.

Their speeches were sprinkled with statistics of how many illegal immigrants populate our country and how much tax revenue is lost by disallowing hard-working immigrants' legal status, while their children citizens are entitled to public education, health care and even some federal programs. Most speeches laid out a pathway to citizenship which included learning English, taking a citizenship course, paying back taxes, background checks and holding a job.

"It never ceases to amaze me how these young girls immediately take charge and just dive into the exercise. They never seem to have a problem with the tight timeframe and present their speeches with the utmost poise and confidence," comments Bobbie Goldstein, LWV-GRBA president and Steering Committee co-chairperson.

She adds, "Our purpose in this program is to incite some passion in our young women, to unlock some door to their possibility of public service, or at least more active civic engagement in their community today and going forward in their lives."

Did the exercise accomplish its intent?

Middletown High School South junior Sarah Conway stated, "It think it is a unique program. I would not have had any knowledge of this unless I came here today. It was interesting to learn how the women never planned to get into politics and how well it turned out for them."

Regina Luisi who accompanied High School South's contingent as their teacher chaperone discussed the day's events on their bus ride back to school.

She comments, "They indicated that the day was much better than they had expected. They learned from the group discussions, speech writing, and subsequent presentation, in addition to how empowered they felt at the end of it all. They really felt they could make real change in the world, and mentioned a couple of areas where they would like to start regarding particular situations at school and in their communities.

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