



The Establishment of The Women's Fund of Southern Alabama

In the summer of 2002, Tom Davis, Executive Director of The Community Foundation of South Alabama, recognized the rise of women's funds across the country, particularly noting the accomplishments of the Women's Fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham. He read how women's funds were removing barriers, providing opportunities, and changing lives. Understanding the needs of women in the South and the power of philanthropy, he believed it was time to establish a similar women's group for southern Alabama. It was time to help women "reach their full potential as shapers of the future." With the administrative help of Janine Phillips, his vision became a reality.

Luncheons were held in Mobile on September 10 and 25 for specific women who had demonstrated leadership in the community and whom Tom felt would be interested in taking the lead in this initiative. At the second luncheon, Francis Verstanvig, a board member of the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, spoke about the success of the Women's Fund in Birmingham, inspiring and challenging Mobile to take action.

From those two events rose 13 women who volunteered to take leadership and became known as the Task Force for the new fund, Women in Philanthropy. Their first meeting was held January 14, 2003 and those members were:

Ms. Mary Margaret Bailey	Frazer Greene Upchurch & Baker LLC
Ms. Kathryn Cariglino <i>(Second Chairperson)</i>	Women's Business Center
Ms. Alberta Davis	YWCA
Ms. Karen Doss	Girl Scouts of the Deep South
Ms. Barbara Drummond	Mobile County Commissioner's Office
Ms. Leslie Fields <i>(First Chairperson)</i>	Davis & Fields
Ms. Robin Harvey	Former Director of Mobile Arts Council
Ms. Debbie Hembree	Adams & Reese
Ms. Rose Johnson	Mobile Co. Dept. of Human Resources
Mrs. Sandra Kendall	Strickland Youth Center.
Ms. Lauren H. Lynn	Morgan Stanley Dean Witter
Ms. Jean Powers	Alford, Clausen & McDonald, LLC
Ms. Erin Wheeler	Former Director of Mobile Co. DHR

Under Leslie Fields' guidance, the Task Force saw the worthiness of following the example of the Birmingham Women's Fund, using their guidelines as a framework for their own. They decided to change the name of the fund to the Women's Fund of Southern Alabama and that the fund would be held at The Community Foundation of South Alabama as a donor advised fund. They also adopted the same eight counties served by The Foundation.

Meeting monthly for over seven months, the Task Force, formed the mission statement, the case statement, the paper "20 Questions about the Women's Fund of Southern Alabama," the committees and developed the duties of Executive Board officers and the Board of Advisors. At the very beginning, they knew the importance of diversity among the Women's Fund members and set as a new goal to involve more women from diverse backgrounds and experiences. So they began to develop a list of nominees for both the Executive Board and Board of Advisors.

Because of the demands of her job, Leslie had to step down as Chair in the spring. The Task Force elected Kathryn Cariglino to replace her. Under her direction, the women began formulating fund raising strategies, set financial commitments of the Executive Board, were able to finalize the guidelines and nominated members to the Executive Board. Most of the women volunteered to be on the Executive Board for the first year. Those who could not wished to serve on the Board of Advisors.

The members of the first Executive Board of the Women's Fund of Southern Alabama met on August 14, 2003 at The Community Foundation. These women were:

Judy Aronson
Mary Margaret Bailey (*Development Committee Chair*)
Kathryn Cariglino
Alberta Davis
Barbara Drummond (*President*)
Dora Finley
Virginia Guy (*Vice President*)
Robin Harvey
Deborah Hembree (*Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair*)
Ramona Hill
Robbie Lynn Irvine
Rose Johnson
Jean Powers
Bowden Sarrett (*Nominating Committee Chair*)
Cynthia Weaver (*Grants Advisory Committee Chair*)
Erin Wheeler

Thus began a new women's initiative for Southern Alabama. They were guided by the principle that, in coming together and pooling their resources, women can help one another. They were committed to support critical programs for women and girls through grants to eligible organizations. Their vision is revealed in the mission statement of the Women's Fund of Southern Alabama:

Dedicated to improving the status and quality of life for women and girls in the eight counties of Southwest Alabama through purposeful philanthropy and the establishment of a permanent endowment.