



Maria Shriver Launches WE Invest, a Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative

Shriver kicks off statewide program at Oakland event with low-income women business owners and would-be entrepreneurs

OAKLAND (March 11, 2007) -- As part of her endeavor to create a powerful, unified community of women helping women, California First Lady Maria Shriver, in partnership with The Women's Conference, today launched WE Invest, a new statewide women's economic empowerment initiative. Designed to promote financial security and unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of women across California, the WE Invest program will partner with non-profit organizations from Oakland to San Diego to help women move forward together on a path toward personal and economic well-being.

"When women are empowered with the tools, support and resources they need to pursue their dreams of financial independence and entrepreneurship, they have the ability to impact the California economy in an immeasurable way," Shriver said. "WE Invest creates a network of women helping other women own their businesses and their lives -- putting money in their pockets, hope in their hearts and a future in their hands."

Shriver launched WE Invest today at a community event in Oakland sponsored by one of the program's partner organizations, the Women's Initiative for Self-Employment. After touring two successful local businesses founded by Women's Initiative alumnae, including [a hair salon and healthy juice bar], Shriver attended a reception and meet-and-greet with the WE Invest/Women's Initiative class of 100.

The Women's Initiative is just one of WE Invest's statewide partners, which also include Ventura County's Women's Economic Ventures and the Community Financial Resource Center in Watts. Each program represents WE Invest's core values and program objectives: to help women overcome social and economic barriers to their journey out of poverty.

Through the Women's Initiative program, each member of the Oakland WE Invest class will receive business training, financing, mentoring and coaching, and have access to a vast network of support services and mentors. The average Women's Initiative graduate starts with a salary of under \$14,000 per year (below the poverty line), increases her income by \$10,000 after one year in the program, and, after two years, will make up to \$37,000.

"Maria Shriver's commitment to increasing economic opportunities through microenterprise is timely as our economy faces a downturn. Women's Initiative is delighted to be chosen as a partner in the WE Invest program that will propel 100 women in Oakland into self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship this year," said Julie Castro



Abrams, CEO. “Oakland is ripe for investment and it is the women starting businesses that will stabilize the economic base.”

California has more female employers than any other state in the nation, and is home to a remarkable 869,000 woman-owned businesses. Yet more than 2.2 million California women and families live in poverty – a statistic Shriver considers unacceptable.

“We Invest will help all women have a seat at the economic table. Only when women and their families are financially secure, and their creativity, ideas and spirit unleashed, will California be able to achieve its full potential,” Shriver said.

The Women’s Conference, a powerful event and thriving network of women spearheaded by Shriver, is proud to sponsor WE Invest as part of its goal to serve as a “conference with a conscience.” 2008 Conference sponsors include: Target, Safeway, Wachovia, PG&E, Mattel, HealthNet, Cisco and Wells Fargo.

“The Women’s Conference is more than just a one-day event – it’s a source of empowerment and inspiration for tens of thousands of women,” said Erin Mulcahy Stein, Executive Director of the Conference. “Our sponsorship of WE Invest will help us extend the Conference’s impact to the women who need it the most.”

For more information on WE Invest, please go to: www.californiawomen.org.

Maria Shriver

Maria Shriver believes "It's All About WE" and in the transformative power of working together to achieve a positive legacy for California. Through her innovative **WE** programs and initiatives, Shriver has issued calls to action that have resounded across the state, enlisting Californians to solve critical issues together. “It’s All About WE” represents Shriver’s boldly creative, nurturing and entrepreneurial vision for California. For more information about “It’s All About WE,” go to www.FirstLady.ca.gov.

The Women’s Conference

The Women’s Conference is the largest and most dynamic one-day gathering of women in the nation. Recognized for its unparalleled capacity to empower and inspire women to become architects of change, the annual Conference unites more than sixty world opinion leaders with 14,000 women in one arena, plus thousands more virtually, to share enriching stories of transformation and success, words of encouragement and life lessons.

Under the leadership of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and First Lady Maria Shriver, the non-profit, non-partisan Conference has grown from a California government initiative for working professionals into a life-changing experience and national network of women from all walks of life, backgrounds and perspectives. Its thriving online community and year-round programs make The Women’s Conference an ongoing source of support, inspiration and motivation for the tens of thousands it touches.

Melissa Nitti: (310) 691-6519

Molly Weedn: (415) 209-4217