

Women lead business communities



Eileen Turner says she enjoys the contact with business people, politicians, homeowners and visitors through her work as executive director of the Troy Chamber of Commerce. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

By KATHLEEN MORAN

Ruth Yount and Eileen Turner have never met.

But their philosophies of a chamber of commerce's involvement in its community are much the same.

Both women are executive directors of a chamber of commerce—Mrs. Yount in Redford Township and Mrs. Turner in Troy. Both are pioneers in their field. While more businesswomen are becoming involved in the chambers, few have made it to the top leadership spot in the community.

As full-time directors, Mrs. Yount and Mrs. Turner have responsibilities ranging from tracking legislation to answering inquiries from companies interested in moving to Redford or Troy.

Both go about the job of promoting their communities as if it were an integral part of their job descriptions.

"I'm sold on Redford Township and I'm sold on the chamber of commerce," said Mrs. Yount, who has spent nine years as executive director and nine years prior to that as an assistant.

"I like the involvement," she continued. "A chamber is involved in every facet of a community. It has a strong impact on the community without getting involved in politics. We can approach anything with objectivity and work solely for the betterment of the community."

MRS. TURNER has worked for the Troy chamber for eight years and lived in Troy for 19 years. "I've watched it grow from the outskirts to a very dynamic community. It wasn't even on the map at one time.

"It has developed so nicely. I really have a lot of pride in it."

Although many think of the chamber only as a stopping point for tourists, it takes on a much more vital role in the busy metropolitan area.

Both Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Yount enjoy keeping tabs on legislation pending in Lansing or Washington which could affect businesses at home.

Formerly active in the Oakland County Republican Party, Mrs. Turner worked for George and Lenore Rom-

ney at various times before joining the chamber.

"I guess that's why I enjoy the chamber so much," she said, noting that her work with the chamber allows her to keep closely in touch with the political scene.

"Politics plays a very important role in everyone's life, whether they realize it or not."

MRS. YOUNT notes that the chamber can have a considerable impact on pending legislation, through the local organizations as well as the state and U.S. groups.

When plans were being made to widen Five Mile in Redford, Mrs. Yount worked with the road commission and business community to keep the inconveniences to small businesses at a minimum.

In Troy, the chamber has played a role in having Rochester Road widened. Although the construction hasn't begun yet, small business owners are already anticipating a business boom once the traffic problems are resolved.

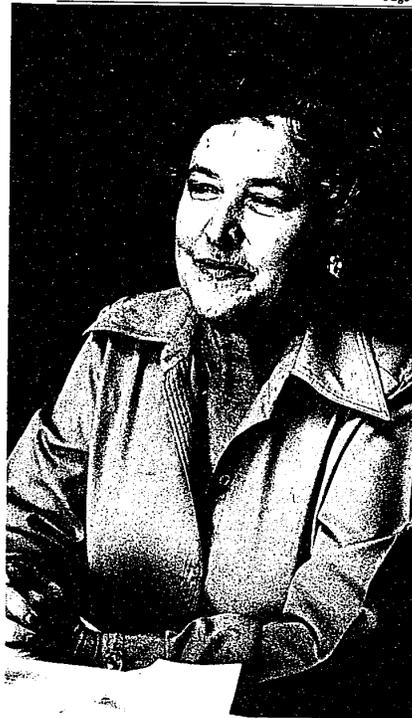
Although memberships in both the Redford and Troy chambers have grown under the leadership of Mrs. Yount and Mrs. Turner, neither will take credit for that.

"When businesses see what we do for the business and residential communities, they want to join," said Mrs. Yount, who has seen her group grow from 100 to 375 in nine years. "It's a natural thing."

The Troy chamber has grown from 78 to nearly 500 members in the last eight years but, Mrs. Turner modestly says, "It has grown significantly as the city has grown."

Mrs. Turner is now spearheading plans for a conference on Oct. 14 to encourage women to get involved in business. When she's not working on the conference, she's also organizing the annual community awards program, slated for Oct. 26, at which nearly 40 volunteers and Troy's distinguished citizen award winner will be honored.

Mrs. Turner recently finished work on her community's annual ox roast and is gearing up for participation in a national business study.



"I like the involvement," says Ruth Yount of her position as executive director of the Redford Township Chamber of Commerce. (Staff photo by Bob Woodring)

Neither would trade her job. "I really love people," said Mrs. Yount. "That's what I'm most grateful for—all the wonderful people I meet."

Notes Mrs. Turner, "I guess what I like about it is the variety. And I get enormous satisfaction from helping other people."

The sexual gauntlet is losing more runners

By CAROLINE PRICE

When working women get together to tell war stories, the conversation often rolls around to a subject that almost all of them have experienced to some degree.

It's called sexual harassment on the job. It can be as mild as a few lewd comments from a co-worker or as serious as the case of the boss who threatens a female employee with the loss of her job if she doesn't dispense sexual favors.

Although the problem has existed ever since men and women have worked together, sexual harassment was once just something that females had to live with. It was not considered a widespread problem.

But recent research has shown that sexual harassment of female employees happens far more often than anyone realized. A study by the Working Women United Institute revealed that 70 per cent of all women sampled had experienced sexual harassment on the job at least once.

'Sexual harassment is the silent sister of rape. There are aspects of sexual harassment that are still socially acceptable.'

**—Judith Doren
Birmingham attorney**

Of those women, 56 per cent had experienced physical harassment and 91 per cent had been subjected to various forms of verbal harassment.

It happens to women of all ages and in all kinds of jobs, although the study said clerical workers and waitresses were most likely to become victims of harassment.

Judith Doren, a Birmingham attorney, said women are beginning to take legal action against the perpetrators of sexual harassment.

"SEXUAL harassment is the silent sister of rape," she said. "There are aspects of sexual harassment that are still socially acceptable."

Ms. Doren has handled several lawsuits involving sexual harassment.

Some were successful, some were not. "My practice doesn't let me see the whole picture of sexual harassment," she said.

She said women who silently endure harassment are far more prevalent than those who finally stand up and refuse to take any more.

"Most women don't walk into an office or educational institution with a chip on their shoulder."

"When they encounter sexual harassment, the reactions are similar to those of a victim of rape. There is guilt and a tendency to dress extremely conservatively. They feel intimidated and experience anger, frustration and headaches," she added.

What action can be taken if sexual

harassment surfaces on the job?

Ms. Doren offers a few guidelines:

• There has to be damage for harassment to be actionable. Business efforts must be frustrated. The victim has to be passed over for promotion or be threatened with the loss of her job.

• The victim ought to look for proof of harassment, such as an eyewitness.

• Find out if other workers have experienced the same problems. This can strengthen a case.

Remember that harassment is, however, still very much a matter of word against word.

Organizations to contact if sexual harassment is experienced include the National Organization of Women, The American Civil Liberties Union or the Equal Employment Opportunity Council.

Dorothy Smith of the Equal Employment Opportunity district council has seen a number of sexual harassment cases pass by her desk.

"More and more cases are being filed and more cases are being won,"

she said. "Courts had a funny bend about these cases, but they are becoming more sensitive in their decisions."

According to Ms. Smith, several recent court decisions have made "giant steps forward in the attitude towards sexual harassment on the job."

However, especially in jury cases, it is often the victim, and not the accused, who goes on trial.

"A woman's morals and lifestyle are still inclined to be judged to some extent," Ms. Smith said.

She said one way to eliminate the problem of sexual harassment is for women workers to group together.

"It helps to have a lot of positive reinforcement," Ms. Smith said.

The Birmingham resident said women should "certainly file charges" if they are harassed and the matter can't be resolved in any other way.

"As it comes out of the closet, women are more willing to say 'I'm a working woman and I'm here to work.' Only when women say they won't take

it anymore will the problem cease."

Ms. Smith feels the growing awareness of the ability to fight back against sexual harassment is "getting to the essence of sexual discrimination."

"A female should be respected for the job she performs. When sexual harassment is overcome in the employment market, it will eradicate much of sexual discrimination."

'Only when women say they won't take it anymore will the problem cease.'

**—Dorothy Smith
EEO district council member**

Perhaps those women who still believe they can advance further on the job by promoting sexual encounters with the boss might feel this is an case of much ado about nothing.

But, Ms. Doren warns, sleeping your way up the corporate ladder is seldom good for more than one rung.

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