

NEWS RELEASE

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## **Spirit of St. Louis (SOS) Women's Fund Bucks Downward Trend and Awards \$195,000 In Charitable Grants to 13 Area Nonprofit Organizations**

### ***Third Round of Grant-Making Totals \$500,000 since 2006 Founding***

ST. LOUIS – The weak economy is creating a double-whammy for nonprofit groups – donations are dropping while requests for assistance are up. In 2009, national corporate foundation donations are projected to decline 10 percent, according to the *Key Facts on Community Foundations* report from the Foundation Center.

Yet the Spirit of St. Louis (SOS) Women's Fund is countering the downward trend with recent awards of \$195,000 in grants to 13 local nonprofits, given at a ceremony earlier in June. Since its founding in 2006, SOS has awarded more than \$500,000 in grants to support 33 varied grassroots nonprofits across the bi-state region.

Colleen Willoughby, founder of the Washington Women's Foundation in Seattle, Wash., served as keynote speaker for the award ceremony. Her foundation – the first of its kind in the country – has generated more than \$9 million in local giving in 13 years. There are now 22 Women's Funds in U.S. cities that follow its giving model.

In 2009, more than 100 St. Louis-area organizations requested grants from SOS exceeding a total of \$2 million. The 2009 grant recipients and the amounts awarded follow: ALIVE provides counseling, emergency sanctuary and critical services to adults and children impacted by domestic abuse; \$10,000 to support the “Nights of Safety” program.

Boys Hope Girls Hope of St. Louis provides value-centered homes and education through college to in-need children; \$10,000 to support summer programs and educational activities.

CASA advocates for abused and neglected children from birth to 18 years of age needing safe, permanent homes; \$20,000 toward adding two case advocacy supervisors to staff.

**College Bound** provides underprivileged high school students with the academic tools and life skills needed to succeed in college; \$20,000 to support 150 current and future students.

**Immigrant & Refugee Women's Program** teaches English, life skills and domestic abuse rights to immigrant women; \$12,000 to support services to 100 women for one year.

**Legal Advocates for Abused Women (LAAW)** provides crisis intervention, advocacy and legal representation; \$20,000 to support free legal representation and the crisis/legal helpline.

**The Little Bit Foundation** provides clothing and supplies to disadvantaged school children at 12 St. Louis area schools; \$20,000 to sponsor one additional school.

**The Mildred Brady and Rena Martin Charitable Foundation** provides comprehensive eye care to the homeless and medically disenfranchised; \$25,000 for optical goods and services.

**Project Backpack** supplies backpacks filled with necessities to at-risk children removed from homes during a crisis; \$5,000 to support staff and \$10,000 to buy backpacks and items.

**Ready Readers** inspires at-risk preschool children to read by hosting readings and increasing exposure to books and stimulating activities; \$15,000 to recruit volunteers and purchase books.

**Sherwood Forest Camp** develops the character and competence of children through camp experiences in a healthy, caring community; \$4,000 to support six campers for 12 days.

**St. Louis ArtWorks** – provides work experience through art apprenticeships to St. Louis metropolitan youth; \$4,000 to support four apprentices in a six-week summer program.

**St. Martha's Hall** helps abused women and children break the cycle of violence in their lives; \$20,000 to fund the children's program coordinator position.

Application review and onsite visits are part of SOS' selection process. Organizations that meet SOS' high standards of quality are voted on (one member-one vote) to ensure equal and fair selection.

According to the **National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO)**, there are more than 72,000 women business owners in the St. Louis region – among the highest in the country. Additionally, trends in giving by gender have been noted by the **IRS**. In 1997, men gave \$18 billion and women gave \$15 billion. By 2005, women gifted \$22 billion, topping men's gifts of \$17 billion.

Founded in 2006, SOS connects women across the bi-state region engaged in significant giving to strengthen the St. Louis community through informed, focused grant-making. The group, a donor-advised fund of the **Greater Saint Louis Community Foundation**, has 201 members with each committed to an annual contribution of \$1,200 or more for five years to fund grants for St. Louis area nonprofit organizations. In 2009, SOS achieved the \$500,000 milestone in charitable giving.

For more information or to join, visit HYPERLINK "http://www.soswomensfund.org"  
[www.soswomensfund.org](http://www.soswomensfund.org).

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Editor's note: The **Spirit of St. Louis (SOS) Women's Fund** is located at the **Greater St. Louis Community Foundation** at 319 N. 4<sup>th</sup> St. in St. Louis, Mo. (63102).

Cutline:

(From left)

**Vicki Sheehan**, president of the **Spirit of St. Louis (SOS) Women's Fund**, **Shelby Schagrin**, founder of SOS, and **Colleen Willoughby**, founder of the **Washington Women's Foundation**, at the SOS grant award ceremony in June 2009. SOS recently presented \$195,000 in grants to 13 local nonprofit organizations in its third year of making grants, topping the \$500,000 milestone since its founding in 2006.