

Heart Beats: The Heart of the Women's Giving Circle of Cumberland County

What is The Women's Giving Circle & What Does It Mean to You?

Alexis C. Board

In 2004 a group of women in our community came together to plant the seed for what we now know as the Women's Giving Circle of Cumberland County. They spent years researching giving circles and how our community could benefit from them. They attended the North Carolina Conference for Women Givers in 2007 and came back with a wealth of knowledge ready to recruit and pave the way for collective giving in Cumberland County. Those ladies are Christin Bellian, Mary Lynn Bryan, Patty Collie, Michelle Courie, Alisa Debnam, Laura Devan, Margaret Dickson, Jean Harrison, Lucy Jones, Sarah Moorman, Terri Union, Kaki Van Sickle, Cynthia Wilson, and Denise Wyatt. As our founding members we felt it fitting to hear from them about what the WGCCC is and what it means to them.

Alisa Debnam is one of our founding members and currently serves as a consultant for RTI on various projects. She has been heavily involved in our community, previously serving as Director of Development for Great Oaks Youth Development Center, Inc. and as Dean of Health Programs at Fayetteville Technical Community College. She has served as past President of Junior League of Fayetteville and as Trustee and Board Chair of Cape Fear Valley Health Systems, Inc. Mrs. Debnam is extremely dedicated to her community and for that we thank her.

1. When you were first approached about the idea of a giving circle in Cumberland County what were your initial thoughts?

Alisa Debnam: Mary Holmes first approached me regarding attending a luncheon with several other women from the community regarding establishing a Giving Circle. After the luncheon, several of us attended a giving circle conference on the campus of St. Augustine's University. The conference was very informative and provided the group with the tools to move forward with the establishment of the Giving Circle.

2. Why did you decide to join the group of women in the founding of the Giving Circle?

AD: I decided to join the group of women in helping to establish the Giving Circle because of the direct impact that the grants would make to our community, because each member had a voice and vote in how the funds would be distributed and I knew that it would be an exciting opportunity for the community.

3. How has serving in leadership roles helped you understand what it is the WGCCC is about?

AD: Since this was a new endeavor for all involved, we learned from experience. Many of the founding members brought a wealth of knowledge to the table, this enabled us to craft what we felt would work best in our community.

4. How would you describe the WGCCC to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

AD: The WGCCC is a group of women of all ages from diverse backgrounds who want to improve the lives of other women and families in Cumberland County. By pooling and leveraging our intellectual and financial resources, we bring about change through allocating small grants to organizations that work to address the needs of women and children in Cumberland County.

5. Why should women join the WGCCC?

We seek is to **EMPOWER** women givers of all backgrounds, **EDUCATE** our community on women's Issues & **IMPACT** positive change by collective giving.

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AD: Women should join the WGCCC to learn first-hand about the needs in Cumberland County, pool their gifts for greater impact and keep themselves current and make a significant difference in the community with like-minded women.

6. Looking back on where you started and where we are today, is it what you envisioned the WGCCC would look like?

AD: In looking back, WGCCC is exactly what we envisioned. I think we all felt that the numbers would be larger.

7. Where would you like to see the WGCCC in 10 years?

AD: Our Strength is in numbers, so in 10 years from now, I would like to see the WGCCC double its membership.

8. Do you think Cumberland County has been impacted by the work of the giving circle? Please elaborate.

AD: Cumberland County has definitely been impacted by the work of the Giving Circle. The report card that is developed provides a concise picture of the needs in our community, because of this I think more women in this community have a better understanding of philanthropy and now participate in philanthropy. Our impact can also be seen by looking at the number of organizations that have been impacted by the grant-making from WGCCC.

Thank you Mrs. Alisa Debnam for your time and commitment in helping to establish the Women's Giving Circle of Cumberland County and your ever involvement in our community.