

# Central New York Women's Fund

Nov. 16, 2004

## Remarks by SU Chancellor Nancy Cantor

It is a true honor to be with the core of women's leadership in Central New York, a region with an extraordinary history of strong women and strong leadership from women. As I have been "exploring the soul of Syracuse," I am repeatedly struck by the courage of the women who struggled for human rights and opportunity, from the clan mothers of the Haudenosaunee to the suffragettes at Seneca Falls to the abolitionists working the Underground Railroad, among other remarkable pioneers over the years.

And today it is exciting to be here with a group of women leaders to mark the changes that have taken place rather dramatically in our lifetime. We've seen girls in sports and women become CEOs and university presidents/chancellors. Science and engineering fields have begun to vigorously recruit women, to name only a few arenas of progress. In other words, we have seen many doors open, and we have taken our "place" at many more tables than ever before, even if we still often find ourselves as a "solo representative" at those tables.

This progress is terrific, and although we have a ways to go, it is still worth a moment of reflection on how important it is that we have a "place" at some of these tables – important for us personally and important for our organizations, communities, and for our children.

One of my favorite pieces is still Virginia Woolf's essay, *A Room of One's Own*, in which, as you know, she argued that women--in that case at Cambridge University in 1928---must have money and a place of their own to be able to write – 500 pounds a year and a room of one's own. And this place must not be a place in the sense of limitation, such as *knowing* your place, but rather, a place in the sense of enabling, that is, *creating* your place.

In my view, this is as true today for us as it was then for Virginia Woolf's peers, as women tried to enter fields and find their way to places that they had not inhabited in any comfortable way before.

Of course, finding a place is wonderful, but making that place work for us is even better. That is, as women gain access – a place at the table of leadership in different sectors of our knowledge economy – we want to keep several things in mind:

First, I think that as women leaders we should take seriously the intent behind Virginia Woolf's message. Hers was, I believe, not a message to simply or quietly "take our place" alongside men---that is, not to inhabit the places already shaped by men---but rather a message to actively create the places we want to inhabit.

We want to work and live in rooms that will allow us to be most creative and productive – our rooms. If we take this message seriously, then we still have a great deal of work to do in designing a "room of our own." What shall our rooms look like? Or, to say it differently, how will organizations and communities change if we actively shape them?

Second, as we take our places at the table, we want to watch to make sure that we consistently work to bring the next generation along as well. We want to keep the pipeline strong and build an intergenerational support network. We want, as the Women's Fund of Central New York does, to reach out to women and down to girls, shaping the leaders for the future.

In this regard, critical mass is very important, for it is difficult to really shape our rooms if we are alone or in a small minority. (This reminds me of Sheila Widnall's famous quip when someone remarked on how nice it was to see women in the National Academy of Sciences, and she said, "I'll be happy when I see as many mediocre women as men in the Academy.")

When we think about how to achieve both of these goals – that is, to create places that we want to inhabit, and to maintain a strong pipeline of women leaders for the future – it is clear that achieving both goals requires active engagement on all of our parts. We have to be prepared to take an active part in our organizations and communities, and to watch out for and support others, both financially and through in-kind networking services. We cannot view "access" passively, as the end rather than the beginning of the story.

As an aside, and from my perch as a social psychologist, I will say that this kind of active engagement and social support networking is very good for us all as individuals, as well as for our community. As Amartya Sen, the Nobel prize-winning moral philosopher and economist argues, quality of life is as much about the way one leads a life – with tasks that are valued and contributions to make – as it is about tangible possessions.

In fact, Phillip Brickman, a former mentor of mine, refers to the “hedonic treadmill” to which we can all succumb---always pushing for more---and contrasts it with the boost in subjective well-being that one obtains from giving to and engaging with others.

Psychologists used to emphasize the social support, for example, that people need *from* others; now there are very strong data demonstrating the positive effects on individual well being of *giving* support, as well as from receiving it. So, as we think about shaping “our rooms” for women to emerge as leaders and reaching out to build a pipeline of girls and women for our future, let’s not forget that doing this will also be good for each of us.

Returning then to my core point – that we must deliberately and actively think about “the rooms” we want to inhabit and the organizations we want our girls to be empowered to lead -- it is perhaps useful to consider the characteristics of the knowledge economy in which we all work.

I will be leaving here this morning and flying to New York City to take part on a panel at a gathering of CEOs, educators, journalists, private and public sector experts, organized by IBM as part of their Global Innovation Outlook. I’ll be brainstorming with colleagues about the changing nature of work (and its relationship to life) as we all try to foster innovation in today’s economy.

It occurred to me that, as we all think this morning about women and leadership, we should cement our efforts in the realities of our global, knowledge economy. So, here are some of the features that IBM’s GIO brainstorming has emphasized so far:

Women and girls will need to be prepared to:

- Participate in many different roles, with changing partners, learning new areas of expertise all the time and engaging with collaborative

work teams, rather than depending on narrowly-defined and stable disciplines or roles or jobs or workgroups;

- Engage in life-long learning and be opportunistic about taking advantage of openings to try new things and take on new tasks;
- Integrate life (family, friends, recreation, civic engagement) and work (jobs, education), 24x7, virtually as well as in any given place (office, home, soccer field, volunteer setting);
- Embrace diversity of cultures, colleagues, generations, and traditions, and comfortably stretch beyond what is familiar;
- Share and invest one's ideas and knowledge ("intellectual property") rather than hoard and own it;
- Interact in more collaborative as compared to hierarchically-structured settings, often using virtual technologies with ever-shifting sets of participants.

In other words, our knowledge economy demands that we all learn how to participate in, prosper in, and lead organizations, communities, and families in which the norms are more collaborative, the boundaries more fluid and dynamic, the participants more diverse, and the settings more virtual than ever before. How do we prepare to do this well?

Although I am an educator, I surely don't have a clear prescription for how to flourish in this challenging knowledge economy. But I do know one thing for sure: this is a real period of opportunity to shape our rooms the way we want them, and I believe that as women we have some real life experience and skills to bring to the newly collaborative, less hierarchical, more fluid environments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

After all, if there is one thing that women have always known how to do, it is to juggle a great deal, moving from setting to setting, getting along with others, sharing both responsibility and credit, maintaining an openness to change. We've had to be opportunistic because rarely have things been handed to us on a silver platter. So, as we gain access, let's use it well to shape our work worlds more in line with our traditions.

Of course, it will also take all the social and philanthropic support that we can muster to build for women and girls a sense of belonging to this new world.

Mentoring can play a key role, but we need to define it in new and flexible ways to keep up with this ever-changing knowledge economy. Traditional definitions of mentoring usually envision a “top-down” model, one where wisdom is imparted from above, as it were. This won’t necessarily work, as we increasingly find ourselves “learning on the job,” so to speak, and interacting with many different partners in fluid settings and positions. In order to prosper, we need to be opportunistic in finding and giving support in new ways.

I have long felt that the formal, traditional view of mentoring — mentoring as a one-sided relationship, where the more powerful person is the mentor who imparts wisdom—is but one perspective on a quite complex subject. Yes, there are times when it is clear that either you have some instrumental help to give to others, or they have experience that you don’t, and it is good to get that mentoring help. But there are other valuable forms of social support or mentoring, too. Colleague-to-colleague, peer-to-peer or novice-to-novice support and discussion may be very useful as we navigate new territory together. I think of this as consensus support or mentoring. The benefit is to share the experience with others to see how much consensus there is with respect to one’s experience. This can be very valuable in combating pluralistic ignorance: the feeling that only you are a bit lost!

So I think we all need to look for opportunities to struggle together through new terrain, especially as the so-called received wisdom of those (typically men) who have already established their place at the table may not be very appropriate for our lives or useful in the new landscape of work. We can’t expect a clear-cut recipe (nor should we want it if we are to shape our own place/room) for success, but we can look to each other to make our way.

Here again we can look to the courage of earlier pioneers in the struggle for opportunity and rights, and see how they forged new territory and supported each other in working outside of conventional wisdom. The history of social movements in this region is replete with overlapping networks of social support operating to bolster each one’s resolve as they pursued different venues for social change. For example, as you all probably know, Frederick

Douglass (living in Rochester at the time) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had been friends of long standing before the Seneca Falls Convention in July, 1848, which produced an outpouring of scorn and derision at the notion that women had rights.

In his newspaper, *The North Star*, Douglass wrote in 1848 that “the bare mention of this truly important subject in any other than terms of contemptuous ridicule and scornful disfavor is likely to excite against us the fury of bigotry and the folly of prejudice. A discussion of the rights of animals would be regarded with far more complacency by many of what are called the “wise” and the “good” of our land than would a discussion of the rights of women.”

But Stanton understood the value of attention from the press, especially when James Gordon Bennett printed the entire Declaration of Sentiments in the *New York Herald* in an effort to make fun of the women, who had adapted the *Declaration of Independence* to suit their needs by substituting “all men” for King George as the agent of the oppression of women.

“Just what I wanted!” said Stanton when she heard what Bennett had done. “Imagine the publicity given to our ideas by thus appearing in a widely circulated sheet like the *Herald*. It will start women thinking, and men too; and when men and women think about a new question, the first step in progress is taken.”

Stanton, Douglass, and the many others who forged new conventions for this region and this society, didn’t stop to worry too much over received wisdom – they didn’t wait for those in powerful places to catch up, but they did know the power of spreading their own word and supporting each other through networks of “ordinary people.”

Today, we must do the same as we shape our own rooms and make sure that other girls and women are positioned to join us. Fortunately, we have joined forces in many ways to give ourselves and other women the power to do this. We are pretty good at looking to each other as we push on, and we know that we need to give each other both tangible support and a hug once and a while. And we need both forms of social support.

In fact, it really helps these days to see more and more philanthropic support from women. We have seen it make a huge difference at Syracuse

University, where Renee Crown has endowed a range of scholarships that enable outstanding undergraduates—men as well as women—to address a huge range of topics and in doing so, light sparks that set them on fire for life. Lola Goldring recently imagined and financed one of the nation’s first arts journalism programs--- with the study of art for journalists and journalism for artists that should greatly strengthen the quality of arts journalism not only in New York, but also all over the nation. Judy Seinfeld has, among other things, created scholarships to promote excellent, creative teaching. And young women are giving to others, even as they forge their own careers. For example, Arielle Tepper, a young theater producer on Broadway and an SU alum, has worked with us to both direct and support a semester program in New York City for drama students to get hands-on experience. In other words, women are not waiting to become “wise and established” before turning to others to give and to receive support.

And, don’t underestimate the power of women when we get started. Others will. For example, women are still not often seen as potential philanthropists, even though in 1998, 39 percent of the top wealth holders in the nation were women, with a combined net worth of almost \$4.2 trillion.

In 2002, one in 11 women in the U.S. owned a business, and their companies employed more people than all the Fortune 500 companies combined.

Because women live longer than men, they will end up in charge of much of the \$41 trillion expected to pass from generation to generation over the next 50 years.

Even the 2003 “Slate 60,” a listing of the 60 largest charitable contributions of the year, contains 10 single women and 25 women with husbands or partners.

Now, as impressive as these numbers are, it is still true that women typically earn less than men and control less wealth. As always, however, there can be strength in numbers and in our willingness to work together. Many who could not afford, on our own, to endow a scholarship or a program could—and should---donate what we can to causes of importance to girls and women. Philanthropy can open up a place at the table for us.

The Women's Fund, now celebrating its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary, celebrates women in philanthropy and wants to motivate and inspire women to join together in its power. It is a movement that is growing, in assets and in membership.

The Women's Funding Network, an umbrella organization of women's funds, reports that 27 new and existing groups have joined the network in just three years, pushing its membership from 69 to 96 foundations. And between 1999 and 2001, grant making and other allocations by women's funds grew by 32 percent—or \$7.3 million—while donations to the funds rose by \$32.7 million, or 71 percent.

As I look at you, and as I join you in dreaming about a better future for everyone in this community, including its girls and women, I can hear the echo of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's voice in my ears: "Just what I wanted!" We are beginning to get places at many tables, and we are going to succeed in shaping those places/rooms if we stick together, as our pioneers in this Central New York region did ever so well.