

Event Shined Spotlight on Calvert Women

Speaker Discusses Human Trafficking

By Dick Myers
Editor

“Be the Influence” was the theme for the 17th Annual Woman of the World luncheon held March 16 at the Rod ‘N Reel in Chesapeake Beach. The annual event is sponsored by the Calvert County Commission for Women and the League of Women Voters of Calvert County.

This year’s keynote speaker was Ambassador Susan Esserman, who held four senior positions in the Clinton Administration, including Deputy U.S. Trade Representative and Assistant Secretary of Commerce. She is currently a partner in a DC based international law firm and is founder and director of the University of Maryland Support, Advocacy, Freedom and Empowerment (SAFE) Center for Human Trafficking.

Before talking about human trafficking, she discussed some of the historical successes and challenges facing women today. She noted the League of Women Voters role in those victories. She said, “On this a hundredth year of the congressional passage of the right of women to vote, we are reminded of the pivotal role that the League of Women Voters played a century ago and continuing to this day in helping women carry out your responsibilities to vote and in using their power to participate in shaping public policy.”

She said when she began her career as a law clerk in DC there was one woman judge in the District Court and no women in the entire federal appeals court for the District of Columbia. Today, half are women.

“Clearly there has been significant progress for women at all levels in law and in government,” she said. “But persistent barriers and head winds remain, particularly as women seek to advance to higher levels of responsibility, leadership and compensation as they rise. Women too often face unequal opportunities and a higher hurdle to prove themselves. This is compounded by the fact that employers generally still provide insufficient accommodation for family responsibilities. As you know, this doesn’t only affect women, but it disproportionately affects women as they often have greater family rearing responsibilities. In my experience, in order to promote the proper advancement of women in law or in any field for that matter, first and foremost, it is essential that women support other women.”

She observed the collective power of “women working together, the vital importance of women supporting one another and the power of mentorship to transform careers.” She added, “I have seen firsthand the profound difference it makes to have women in leadership positions. Women bring different perspectives that can contribute to greater fairness and inclusion, a more supportive working environment, including more accommodation for family

responsibilities, and they also contributed to sound decision making.”

Esserman quoted Michelle Obama: “You will not always be able to solve all the world’s problems at once, but don’t ever underestimate the importance you have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope takes on a life of its own.”

She then switched to talk about her current passion – the fight against human trafficking worldwide and especially close to home at “the country’s first university based comprehensive research and advocacy center for human trafficking survivors.”

The center was founded, she said, “with the goal of restoring the dignity and human rights to survivors of sex and labor trafficking. The concept arose out of my experience providing pro bono or public interest legal assistance to sex trafficking victims. Through the cases I took on, I was shocked to learn the extent of human trafficking in the state of Maryland.”

She continued, “I came to realize that successfully serving the legal needs of human trafficking victims was not sufficient. That much broader assistance was needed to enable human trafficking survivors to overcome the trauma of their trafficking.”

“At the Safe Center, we provide bilingual legal services, social services, mental health and medical care, economic empowerment programming, and crisis intervention services,” she said.

She told the story of a young woman who left her child behind to come to America for a job to pursue the American Dream. The job she was promised turned out to be prostitution and she was forced to have sex multiple times daily under threat her child would be harmed if she didn’t comply. Her rescue was one of the center’s successes.

“She was trafficked up and down the east coast from New York to South Carolina and much of the trafficking occurred here in Maryland,” Esserman said.

“Traffickers prey on people who are vulnerable, impoverished, and oppressed. They prey on migrants and refugees. They prey on those fleeing from conflict, gang violence and natural disasters. Few people appreciate the extent of trafficking here in the United States; experts estimate that several hundred thousand victims are trafficked within the US each year” she explained.

Esserman reported that in 2016 Washington DC ranked first and Baltimore 14 among American cities in trafficking cases per capita and Maryland ranked 13th among states for reports of human trafficking. She said three bills dealing with trafficking are currently wending their way through the Maryland General Assembly, including making trafficking a felony and removing criminal records of victims.

Esserman concluded by saying that Frederick Douglass warned that slavery would not end with emancipation, that the

snake would raise its ugly head. She said, “This old snake has come forth today. Hundreds of thousands of human trafficking victims live in fear and despair in our great nation. The monster wears a different skin, but make no mistake, this is slavery and together it is our work to end it.”

The program was moderated by Commission for Women President Joan Winship and Grace Mary Brady of the League of Women Voters. Winship noted a letter printed in the program from former U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski, the longest serving female senator. Mikulski wrote, “Calvert County might be the home of a nuclear power plant, but it is no match for the energy of Calvert County women and their many contributions to their community and country.”

During the event the following awards were handed out by various community organizations:

- Calvert Collaborative for Children and Youth – Alexis Hill
- Calvert County Commission for Women – Rane Franklin, Danielle Frye and Marsha Gast Rymer
- Calvert County Historical Society – Rosemary Dawley



Ambassador Susan Esserman

- Calvert County Minority Business Alliance – Cynthia Thorne-Carter
- Community Mediation Center of Calvert County – Vicky and Dusty Rhoades
- Concerned Black Women of Calvert County – Casandra Okwumabua
- League of Women Voters -- Casandra Okwumabua and the Voter Service Team of Ashley Anderson, John Ashby, Janet Bellizzi, Sharron Bickel, Carol Booker, Judy Hooker and Gladys White
- Calvert County Branch of the NAACP – Darlene Harrod.

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Maryland Day Events in St. Mary's County

Celebrate Maryland Day in St. Mary's County with events that commemorate this historic day at the places where it all began.



Bottony Award; a flag ceremony featuring students from across Maryland representing their home counties; & music from local groups.

Historic St. Mary's City Saturday, March 23, 2019 • 10-4PM

Celebrate Maryland's 385th anniversary with ceremony, pageantry, speeches, & FREE admission to living history & museum exhibits. Official program begins at 1PM at the reconstructed State House of 1676 (47418 Route 584, St. Mary's City) & includes: the presentation of HSMC's highest honor, the Cross

St. Clement's Island Museum Monday, March 25, 2019 • 2-3PM

Ceremony: 2-3PM

Free Admission & Water Taxi Rides: 10-5PM

Celebrate the founding of Maryland & landing of the first settlers at the state's birthplace at St. Clement's Island Museum with a ceremony featuring guest speakers, dignitaries from around the state & program. Rev. G. Ronald Murphy, S.J., a member of the Jesuit Community at Georgetown University will be this year's keynote speaker & will bring the original iron cross that was brought to St. Clement's Island, back to St. Mary's County for display. The museum & water taxi will be operating FREE for visitors prior to & after the ceremony, 10-5PM.



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