

Sangita Sigdya with MicroCredit Summit Campaign addresses an inquisitive audience during the Empowering Women Entrepreneurs conference held at The Crossings November 30 – December 1, 2007.

# Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

## Austin Women Entrepreneurs CAN Make a Difference

Story by Patricia Ann Jordan

Photos by Miriam Conner

**“IF YOU ARE COMING TO HELP ME, YOU ARE WASTING my time...but, if you are coming because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”** This is a quote from an Indigenous Leader which truly depicts the essence of the Empowering Women Entrepreneurs conference, held at The Crossings Leadership Retreat Center (LRC). The EWE conference, which was produced by FLOW, an organization co-founded by John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods Market, and Michael Strong, was dedicated to liberating the entrepreneurial spirit for good.

“Our purpose this weekend is focusing on women entrepreneurs in developing countries... not about us doing something for them but coming together,” stressed Jeff Klein, executive director and chief activation officer for FLOW.

FLOW is a non-profit corporation promoting entrepreneurial initiatives that focus on the goals of

sustainable peace, prosperity and happiness for all, in our lifetime. FLOW advances its mission through its educational programs (Empowering Women Entrepreneurs, Peace Through Commerce, and Conscious Capitalism) and through publishing.

The co-sponsored interactive conference illuminated the importance of supporting women entrepreneurs in developing countries to help alleviate poverty. One fascinating way of doing so is through microfinance. This is a term for the practice of providing financial services, such as credit, savings and insurance, in small amounts, frequently less than \$100 (U.S.).

Microfinance and the Women's Economic Empowerment movement are gaining popular recognition as keys to peace and prosperity. Michael Strong, co-founder and chief visionary officer of FLOW stressed, “We are committed to elevating awareness of the issue of women's economic empowerment to a level comparable to that of global warming and AIDS, with resultant attention and resources directed towards supporting women

**“Women I met at EWE over the weekend said they were feeling inspired, renewed, refreshed. Whatever it is about women entrepreneurs making the world a better place...it's certainly contagious, joyful, energizing and 'Wow!' ”**

– Phyllis Blees

See EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS on page 26



## How Austin Women Entrepreneurs Can Make a Difference Globally

1. Entrepreneurs, mentors and volunteers interested in supporting the development of a women-led remote services industry in Bulgaria as a pro-woman legacy of the 5<sup>th</sup> World Women's Conference in Sofia 2010. Contact Austinite Michael Strong, [michael@flowidealism.org](mailto:michael@flowidealism.org).
2. View, support and purchase gorgeous products from Austin-based and other organizations making a difference and empowering women micro-entrepreneurs in the developing world in their quest for self-sufficiency by visiting Austinite Lila Igram's ConnectHer at <http://connecther.ning.com>
3. Individuals interested in alleviating poverty in Bangladesh by building professional relationships with budding Bangladeshi women entrepreneurs, visit Austinite Sara Siddiqi of Experience Bangladesh, <http://www.experiencebangladesh.com/>.
4. Support a Maverick education for a budding woman entrepreneur at Diane Carroll's Maverick Center, <http://www.maverickcenter.com/>.
5. Work with Austin-based microfinance organizations The Whole Planet Foundation, <http://www.wholeplanetfoundation.org/>, or Discover Hope, <http://discoverhopefund.org>.

See GLOBAL DIFFERENCE on page 26



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EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS from page 24  
entrepreneurs and advancing a global women's economic empowerment movement."

Sangita Sigdya, deputy director of the Microcredit Summit Campaign, spoke about how her organization brings practitioners, donor agencies, government leaders and other stakeholders to the table to forward the movement. Hopefully, by connecting to this campaign, local woman entrepreneurs can participate in this global effort to empower women and families.

Austin women entrepreneurs can also connect to the Whole Planet Foundation, a local nonprofit established by Whole Foods Market, that provides grants to microfinance institutions in Latin America, Africa and Asia. These institutions then develop and offer

microenterprise loan programs, training and other financial services to the self-employed poor.

Whole Planet Foundation, partnering with 2006 Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus and others, is planning to launch an Austin Leadership Network in 2008 which will provide women entrepreneurs and others a chance to get involved in the mission and help plant seeds of economic prosperity around the globe through microlending.

The EWE interactive conference included presentations, discussions not only on microfinance but also economic freedom and entrepreneurial culture. These three components are viewed as the three principal elements of the women's economic empowerment system.

See MAKE A DIFFERENCE on page 86

RIGHT: Claudia Conner (holding microphone) with Big Austin, speaks to the group.

FAR RIGHT: (L to R) Claudia Conner with Big Austin joins Dawn Davies of The Crossings and Maura Rehfuß with Deep in the Heart of Texas during the 2-day Empowering Women Entrepreneurs conference at The Crossings.



GLOBAL DIFFERENCE from page 24

6. Sign up to sponsor or host a speaker on the topic of Empowering Women Entrepreneurs (EWE), by going to <http://www.riseaustin.org/>

7. Contact Big Austin, <http://www.bigaustin.org/>, for local micro-entrepreneurs to support by purchasing their products and services, mentoring them, financing them, or otherwise helping the mission of Big Austin.

8. Austin female (and male) students can enter the Social Innovation Competition at the RGK Center for Philanthropy & Community Service right here in Austin contact Heather Alden at [heather.alden@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:heather.alden@mail.utexas.edu).

9. Buy products made by microentrepreneurs in the developing world from Surevolution, [www.surevolution.com](http://www.surevolution.com), Economic Development Imports, [www.edimports.com](http://www.edimports.com), World of Good, [www.worldofgood.com](http://www.worldofgood.com), or Ten Thousand Villages Austin store, [www.tenthousandvillages.com](http://www.tenthousandvillages.com).

For more information on *The Crossings*, go to [www.thecrossingsaustin.com](http://www.thecrossingsaustin.com).



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### Upcoming Events and Programs

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**Full-circle Investment Group:**  
 For those who want to actively invest or learn about the process. Lunchtime meeting,  
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 Call 219-0996, or email [jerri@launchaustin.com](mailto:jerri@launchaustin.com)

**Launch Austin Advisory Board Formation:**  
 For the business owner who wants an advisory board for mentorship and support.  
 Free Brown Bag Luncheon to introduce this opportunity. Call 219-0996 or email [amy@launchaustin.com](mailto:amy@launchaustin.com)

**Coming soon!**  
**The NAWBO ( National Association of Women Business Owners) Greater Austin Chapter is now in formation.**  
 Call 329-0108 or email [cynthia@launchaustin.com](mailto:cynthia@launchaustin.com)



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Connecting and promoting women and their businesses

EXPOSING SILENT RACISM from page 21

When I was ready to start work on my dissertation, I remembered those workshops and thought it would be interesting to study racism in white women who are not expected to be racist. A few people thought I was nuts to study that – they thought blatant racism was more important. It turns out that what I was tapping into – silent racism in well-meaning white people – is very important because silent racism accounts for much of the institutional racism that produces racial inequality.

**AW: WHAT HAS BEEN THE REACTION TO YOUR BOOK FROM AFRICAN-AMERICAN COLLEAGUES?**

**BT:** *Silent Racism* has been very well received in the black community. I did a workshop in Houston in August at the Center for Racial Healing, and the audience (about half black, half white) was very excited about the ideas in the book. Forty people attended the workshop, and the center sold 40 copies of *Silent Racism*.

Dr. Sherri Benn, director of Multicultural Student Affairs at Texas State, has been very enthusiastic about my work. After reading the book, she invited me to speak at the Leadership Retreat for Texas State minority leaders.

**AW: WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK AND WHY?**

**BT:** My goal is to get well-meaning white people to think differently about racism, to stop denying that they occasionally have racist thoughts, and that those thoughts may occasionally slip out or influence a decision they make. This is not easy to do because we are so used to thinking that racism is always hateful.

**AW: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER WOMEN WHO ARE WONDERING WHETHER OR NOT IT'S "TOO LATE" TO PURSUE A NEW CAREER PATH OR PASSION?**

**BT:** I would say that it's NOT too late! I remember one of my sisters saying that she was very concerned when I decided to move to Austin after I finished the Ph.D. (remember, I was 56 at the time). I had no job, but I wanted to live in Texas. I couldn't find any teaching positions in the area at the time, so I signed up for a six-week course at the Entrepreneur Association on how to start your own

business. I figured that if I didn't find an academic position, I could become a diversity trainer.

About halfway through the course, I found out about a one-year teaching job at Texas State (Southwest Texas at that time). Eventually a tenure-track position opened up, and I was able to get it as well. I have never felt that my age worked against me. ★

**MORE INFO**

[www.silentracism.com](http://www.silentracism.com)

MAKE A DIFFERENCE from page 26

Joyce Beck, co-founder and owner of The Crossings, who attended EWE and thoroughly enjoyed the experience, stated, "The Crossings was literally created to hold workshops and conferences like EWE. It was informative; provided opportunity for networking; inspiring; and most importantly, it was a statement of encouragement and challenge to women entrepreneurs in Austin, our nation, and world, to get directly involved in making our world more sustainable and peaceful." She added, "The Crossings' mission is to inspire individual and organizational transformation. The EWE conference resonated indeed with our mission. Thank you, FLOW."

The LRC is an extension of The Crossings' philosophy for promoting wellness and sustainability to meet individual needs as well as those of organizations. Programs offered through the LRC, including the EWE conference, help both individuals and organizations manage important changes and accomplish organizational transformations in order to achieve targeted goals.

"We were excited to collaborate with FLOW to offer the Empowering Women Entrepreneurs conference at The Crossings' Leadership Retreat Center," Ken Beck, co-founder and owner of The Crossings, said. "Our mission includes providing people with resources for promoting long-term sustainability, which is reflected in this cutting-edge event that brings people together to inspire change."

When women were asked why they attended the conference, they uniformly answered: "because they wanted to know how to have a global impact." This resonated well with Phyllis Blees, principal partner of Law Offices of Philomena Blees, who

## Be Encouraged Today

There is a book of the Bible known as the Song of Solomon. This book is believed to be written by the great King Solomon. It is a poem of love. There are different interpretations regarding this passage; one being it is an allegory of a love affair. Jews from ancient times believed the love relationship represented the love between God and his chosen people. Another interpretation is by Christians who believe it represents the love between Christ and the Church. I believe in both. I believe God used Solomon to write this story as an example of his great love for mankind.

Song of Solomon 2:4 says, "He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love." What a beautiful picture. God invites us to his house for a banquet and the emblem he places over our chair is love. He wants the universe to know that we, mankind, are his love. I am his beloved. You are his beloved.

Be encouraged today, if this Valentine's Day finds you without that special someone, please do not despair. God loves you and he wants the universe to know: His banner over you is love.

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