

# Connections to Success Presents "Dare to Soar"



**By: Amie Bossi**

Do you know what a "living wage" is? A good explanation is "...the amount of income needed for a family to meet its basic needs without using public assistance," according to the Department of Economic Development. For example, a single mother with two young children living in the urban areas of Missouri needs to earn at least \$15.75 an hour to provide basic needs for her family. Considering that the minimum wage in Missouri is only \$5.15 per hour, one can quickly surmise there's a gap between an earned wage and a living wage.

How is that earnings gap bridged? Connections to Success (CtS), a local nonprofit organization, seeks to overcome this earnings gap through its various programs that include everything from Career Development and business attire (through its Dress for Success Midwest program) to mentoring and transportation assistance (Wheels for Success).

CtS is proud of its holistic approach to helping people achieve self-sufficiency. "We are unique in that we realize each person has many different needs. Every program participant that we work with completes a 'life plan' which addresses every aspect of their lives in which they wish to set goals - everything from their spiritual and social aspects to basic needs like shelter and transportation. We help them to break those goals into small steps and then work with them to achieve those steps," says Co-director, Kathy Lambert.

Most clients who walk through the doors of CtS need assistance finding

employment. Weekly Employment Readiness classes are offered that cover everything from communication skills to resume writing. For women in the program, they're also provided an interview suit through Dress for Success Midwest. Once employed, they may join the Professional Women's Group (PWG), an innovative job retention program designed to help women who have recently entered the workforce move forward in their careers and lives. The monthly meetings offer PWG members an

night and she didn't know how she would get home. She only knew that her mind and soul needed the support and encouragement offered at the meetings as she had fallen on tough times and was about to lose her job. One by one, each member offered gas money from their own pockets, potential job openings and words of support and inspiration. Kathy wasn't surprised at the generosity from the women saying, "This is what PWG is all about - encouraging and supporting one another!"

day event! Thirty women landed new jobs because of employers at the event hiring them, and fifteen decided to further their education as a result of various schools promoting at the event. This year the conference is shaping up to be even bigger!

Save May 17th for the event themed "Dare to Soar!" Over 400 women are expected to attend. The St. Louis Marriott Hotel has donated its ballroom to host the conference. Other sponsors include Kellwood, Nestle Purina and AmerenUE. Topics for breakout sessions range from "Networking" to "Tips to Get to the Top." Vendors are already securing booths and range from schools and companies hiring new employees to local businesses promoting their products. The special treat at the conference is the keynote speaker, Cee Cee Michaela. She has starred on Broadway and in the TV show *Girlfriends* and can't wait to share her story of trials and tribulations on her journey to success.

There are many surprises in store for all event attendees. Tickets are \$25 for non-members of CtS and \$15 for members. These low prices include a conference goodie bag, a three-course lunch and more! Doors open at 8:00 AM and the event concludes at 4:00 PM after a "Working Women's Fashion Show" featuring CtS participants as the models!

An attendee from last year said of the day, "I am so inspired, fulfilled

and rejuvenated! This was much needed and MUCH appreciated. I can't wait for next year!"

**For more information or to inquire about sponsorships, purchase tickets or become a vendor, please call Amie at (314)333-4490, X110.**



opportunity to hear a guest speaker covering topics ranging from health and wellness to unwritten rules of the workforce.

The most exciting aspect of PWG is how the women inspire and motivate one another. At a recent meeting, a PWG member explained to the group that she only had enough gas in her tank to get to the meeting that

Kathy's dream of providing encouragement and support, along with other resources, was fulfilled last May when community members came together to plan and implement the First Annual Entry Level Women's Conference. Over 300 women and PWG members attended this one-

