

## Women In Leadership Highlights March 27, 2008



Stephanie Davis

**“Sisters Together: One for All, All for One”** - featuring Stephanie Davis, Policy Advisor on Women’s Issues, Office of the Mayor and Exec. Dir. of GA’s Women’s Policy Group. A tireless and selfless advocate for women and girls in the Atlanta community, Stephanie is perhaps best known as the founder and “inspiritor” of the Atlanta Women’s Foundation (AWF). Over an 11 year period, she helped grow AWF into a model for the rest of the country and raised millions of dollars and established an endowment. Among her other achievements: Rosalynn Carter Honorary Fellow in Women & Policy for Emory and Board member for the White House Project whose mission is to promote women’s leadership in all spheres – political, business, social, etc.

### Highlights:

- Stephanie is a life-long feminist, a Jew raised in Florida, is single and 61 years old -- and proud of it!
- Her mother was an early inspiration and had a tremendous impact on Stephanie’s thinking and career path. First woman in the FL state senate. Her mom told her she was born to change the world and to heal the world, concepts she takes very seriously.
- Grew up in Tampa also influenced by her father, a successful businessman, who was able to give her a rather privileged upbringing. She always knew not everyone was “like her” but she’s always enjoyed the challenge of being different and meeting others who don’t necessarily look or act or think like she does. Her dad helped to teach her to become a “fearless warrior” for what she believed in and that she has!
- Graduated from Skidmore College, a woman’s college, and later got a masters in Feminist Studies in Boston (first program of its kind).
- Stephanie recently heard Angela Davis, the “radical from the 60’s” who returned to ATL to speak at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Angela was introduced for her “courage” and Stephanie was re-inspired!
- Another woman of courage and conviction who is a role model and a friend of Stephanie’s is Marie Wilson, founder of the MS Foundation, Take Your Daughter to Work Day, and now is the leader of the White House Project to help get more women into public office and all levels of leadership across our society.
- Stephanie started her work for women when she opened the first Women’s Shelter in Charleston, SC, My Sister’s House. Part of a national movement just beginning. Difficult time but she persevered and later, she was asked to come to ATL to do more of the same.

- The YWCA in ATL wanted to start a Women's Shelter in Clayton Co. – in an attic. Many stories there.
- The next chapter in her life and career would be around “women's philanthropy.” She recognized the needs were great for the protection and rights of women and girls and she believed that women together could do something about these issues.
- Then and now there are 3 “legs of the stool”: (1) Raising awareness; (2) Changing policy; and (3) Advocacy for private services.
- The Atlanta Women's Foundation (AWF) was born and supported by the Atlanta Community Foundation (Alicia Philipp) in order to catalyze women to help other women. It fostered a sense of change not charity. Women could begin to put some of their family's assets into these initiatives, not just money from the cookie jar. Most importantly, a network was created. A network that allowed organizations of all kinds, professional etc, to conduct their own fundraisers to benefit AWF. From that would come millions of dollars and an endowment.
- For 11 years, Stephanie served the AWF. A disagreement with the Board about her running for public office (House of Representatives) while working with AWF led to her resignation and change of direction.
- Taking time off, she traveled to India and other places and reflected on her life so far and the next stage.
- That next step turned out to be hooking her star to that of Mayor Shirley Franklin. Stephanie came up with an idea and made a “plea” to the Mayor to work in her administration as an advisor on women's issues, agreeing to make her own salary and budget. She calls herself “a social entrepreneur.”
- One of the main areas of focus / passion would be child prostitution in the city of ATL. Angela's House was started. Studies have been done that have been replicated around the country. Made the link between prostitution and the adult entertainment industry! More info: [www.womensagenda.com](http://www.womensagenda.com)
- “DEAR JOHN” campaign was recognized with a “best public service announcement award.” Helped to get law changed / raised for the legal age of exotic dancers from 18 to 21. Still over 800 girls applied last year who were under age. Many of these girls have been sexually abused. Also helped to create a “JOHN's school” to reduce recidivism among this group of men. Got more women on the vice squad. Went after Craigs list for their part in this problem.
- Latest efforts: fire stations will become a refuge of safety for any girl or woman who needs to seek protection from violence or abuse. Will have at least one fireman in each station who is trained to counsel the victims who come there and will help them get to a safe place.
- RE the White House project, she believes strongly – and there is data to support it – that women leaders at any level in all organizations can make a difference. But the percentages are still low across the board except in nonprofit roles.
- Women's Policy Group actually started 20 yrs ago in her living room. Recognized women need lobbyist. 90% of Legal Aid caseload is women. Also women are target for sub-prime loans. Currently WPG is rebranding itself and plans to have chapters across the state.
- What can WE DO? We need more women's shelters across the state (Gwinnett doesn't have one and it's the largest county with definitely cases of domestic violence). We need to follow the current legislation and Gen. Assembly to support issues related to women and girls and families. WPG sends out regular emails re bills that matter to all of us. We also need to support getting more information out / and educating young girls re date abuse and rape. Girls must not think “we get what we deserve” due to low self esteem.

Watch out for what our girls are doing on the internet, and warn them about the bad things that can happen as a result.

- May 26<sup>th</sup> is the next event at the Atlanta City Council Chamber hosted by the Women's Policy Group