

Hitting the Granite Ceiling

Women still struggle for equality in NH's workplaces.

BY TRICIA L. HAYES

It's official — it doesn't pay to be a woman in NH.

A recent study commissioned by the NH Women's Policy Institute and conducted by Dr. Ross Gittell, an economist at the University of NH, found that women in NH's workforce continue to make significantly less than their male counterparts. And that gap widens as women attain higher academic credentials, according to the study.

It's not just men that NH's businesswomen lag behind. The study, entitled "The Economic Status of Working Women in New Hampshire," found they also make less than their peers nationally. And despite women taking the helm at some of NH's largest companies in the past two years — including Verizon, Anthem, Fidelity, and Laconia Savings Bank — the study found they are the exceptions rather than the rule. And the more education a woman attains in NH, the more marked the disparity in income.

Is There a "Granite Ceiling?"

The report caused a stir among business leaders and government officials when it was released in May. Robin Comstock, president and CEO of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, says she "couldn't let the report go." She organized a roundtable discussion with prominent NH business leaders.

Among the ideas discussed were developing a statewide women's leadership program, more financial incentives for women entrepreneurs and mentoring programs for young

girls and women. However, the roundtable participants agreed that more research and discussions are necessary to fully understand the report's implications and the practical realities that women face in NH's workforce before solid solutions can be developed. "We don't fully understand the disparity. How much of it is because women choose to be home and then cumulatively have lower salaries?" Comstock says.

Comstock presented the group's discussion points to Gov. John Lynch and Gittell. Lynch has been meeting with leading business officials on the issue and voiced support for opening up a statewide discussion about how to improve the economic status of working women. Gittell says he is both surprised and encouraged by the reaction the study has received and the high level of interest "to help support economic progress and success for females in New Hampshire."

Leaders React

Alyson Pitman Giles, president and CEO of Catholic Medical Center in Manchester, agrees that the report's findings need to be fleshed out more. With two decades of executive experience in the healthcare industry, Pitman Giles says she has seen the

progress women have made in the workforce. She is no stranger to breaking down gender barriers. She was the first woman to join the Queen City Rotary in 1988 and in May became the first woman in the 15-year history of this magazine's Business of the Year Awards to be named the Business Leader of the Year.

She says that the high number of women professionals working part-time can represent a positive paradigm shift. A few years ago,



Women in NH's Workforce

Among the findings of "The Economic Status of Working Women in New Hampshire" are:

- A working woman in NH makes only 73 cents to a working man's dollar.
- In their prime earning years, women earn 60 percent of what men their age earn.
- Six out of 10 married women work full time, while nine out of 10 married men are employed full time.
- Women in the state who have doctoral degrees and work full-time earn only two-thirds of what similarly qualified men earn.
- Only 2 percent of women working full-time in the state earn more than \$100,000.
- Only eight percent of working women in NH are CEOs.
- Approximately one in four working women are employed on a part-time basis in NH as opposed to one in 20 men.
- While 58 percent of current graduates from NH's four-year colleges are women, 67 percent of NH workers at or near the minimum wage are also women. ■





(Lottery) sales people are really order takers. We need to energize them to be more like salespeople in other organizations." The NH Lottery operates with 50 employees — a number that hasn't changed in the past 10 years, Wisler says.

He adds, "I think it's a very efficient operation." In order to be more efficient, the NH Lottery, with the blessing of the Legislature, turned its oversight of bingo games and Lucky 7 pull-tabs over to the jurisdiction of the state's Pari-Mutuel Commission in January. He says the state only takes in \$2 million in revenue from the \$85 million generated annually by charitable gaming. "It was taking half of our administrative time to (oversee) those," Wisler says, pointing out that was time that wasn't being spent on developing new Lottery products.

"I can take two days to develop a \$5 game that brings in \$2 million or spend half my time for the year on charitable gaming and bring in the same amount of money," he says.

Playing Responsibly?

The NH Lottery was among the first to roll out a "Play Responsibly" advertising campaign six years ago, with the message also printed on the back of tickets, and the first to require pull-tab ticket manufacturers to also print the message, Wisler says. The Lottery's Web site also lists resources that assist people with problem gambling.

However, other states have more extensive programs to combat chronic gambling, including financial support to organizations that help people with gambling problems. Connecticut contributes \$1.2 million annually to combat the problem and Massachusetts appropriates \$1 million. However, Wisler says that the Lottery's games are a "slow form of gaming" that don't appeal to chronic problem gamblers. "It's a different product than if you go to Foxwoods. We don't necessarily appeal to the gamer who wants a lot of action," he says. ■

The Retail Gambit

Lottery sales are not only big money for the state, but for private businesses as well. In 2004, the Lottery paid approximately \$12 million in retailer commissions. Rick Wisler, executive director of the NH Lottery, points out that's in addition to the money spent on other products by customers coming into retailers to buy Lottery tickets.

Of the 1,200 retail outlets selling NH Lottery games, only 70 are state liquor stores. The bulk of the businesses selling them are convenience stores and supermarkets.

The state has built-in incentives and convenience to entice stores to sell the games. Retailers have to complete a licensing application, but do not pay a licensing fee. They receive tickets on consignment so they only pay for the tickets they actually sell. The state provides each outlet with free marketing materials and a sales terminal. Retailers keep 5 percent of all Lottery sales and if they sell a winning ticket, they also receive up to \$30,000. ■



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she says, if a woman took time off to raise a family, she was hard-pressed to get back into the business world. "Now 90 percent of our female physicians who have a child want to work part time," Pitman Giles says, "and they embrace it and want to do it."

The report identifies healthcare as one of the industries that predominantly employs women, particularly the field of nursing. However, disparities still exist. While approximately 10 percent of nurses in the country are male, men make up more than 10 percent of chief nurse executives, says Pam Duchene, vice president of Patient Care Services at St. Joseph Hospital in Nashua. During her 15-year career as a healthcare executive in several states since 1990, Duchene has frequently been the only female member of corporate boards and senior management teams. However, she says that is changing.

Education and flexible scheduling are areas that the report identifies as being essential to improving women's economic and employment prospects. Catholic Medical Center offers a variety of on-site classes and degree programs to its staff. St. Joseph's offers tuition reimbursement.

Cirtronics, a contract manufacturer in Milford led by Gerardine Ferlins, offers a flexible work schedule to employees, 65 percent of whom are women. The company allows employees to change their work schedules to suit their individual needs, says Nancy Lynch of Cirtronics' Human Resources department. The result, she says, has been successful employee retention.

Linda Normandin, president of Laconia Savings Bank, says her bank allows employees to accrue "earned time," so they can tailor their paid time off to their needs, including taking time off to care for children or parents, or take vacations.

During her 30-year career at the bank, Normandin worked her way up the corporate ladder from a teller to being named president in January. She too says she has seen progress within her industry. "People have to recognize that it's an evolution," she says.

What struck Comstock most about the report is the implication that there are "extraordinary opportunities" to utilize untapped resources and for women to enter male-dominated sectors of the market, such as engineering and the sciences. Comstock adds that NH is in a unique position to address the disparity because it is a small state with business leaders who know one another. "Small behavioral shifts (here) have profound effects," she says. ■



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