



*To foster leadership in business, government, and non-profit organizations
that more fully reflects our community.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Women's Leadership Conference of Southern Oregon Announces 2021 Theme and Speakers; and April 1, 2021 Kickoff Event

[Ashland, Ore] The Women's Leadership Conference of Southern Oregon will offer its annual conference virtually on May 7, 2021. This year's conference theme is ***Embracing Change***.

History of the Women's Leadership Conference

The Women's Leadership Conference of Southern Oregon grew out of conversations between women in our community of Southern Oregon with a common goal—to see more women represented in leadership roles. *What barriers existed for these women? What could be done to remove them?* A coffee date between Jeanne Stallman and the late Karen Blair was the start of the idea that spurred the Women's Leadership Conference (WLC) of Southern Oregon.

A Medford native, Karen was elected to the City Council in November 2010. Jeanne wanted to know what it was like, being the *only woman* on the Medford City Council, and the vehemence of Karen's reaction to that question surprised Jeanne: Clearly frustrated by the lack of representation by women in elected office locally, Karen wondered why there had only ever been *one* woman on the City Council at a time.

Around this same time Pauline Brady, then a Medford School Board director, hosted a non-partisan lunch to tackle the very same issue. She cited a study showing that men needed little urging to run for office, while women on average had to be asked seven times before they would even begin to consider the possibility.

Months later at a University Club lunch, Jeanne recounted these conversations and made an off-the-cuff comment that perhaps *we needed some kind of an event or conference to encourage more women to step forward as community leaders*. Retired Southern Oregon University president Elisabeth Zinser, standing nearby, turned sharply and enthusiastically said, “Yes! That is exactly what we need!”

On June 4, 2012, Jeanne Stallman invited a small group of community leaders to the Higher Education Center in Medford to explore the idea of a Women’s Leadership Conference. The idea was cemented when Patsy Smullin, owner of California-Oregon Broadcasting, whipped out her checkbook and offered to write a check right then and there to get the ball rolling.

In addition to Jeanne Stallman and Patsy Smullin, the Women’s Leadership Conference has two more ‘founding mothers’: Sue Kupillas, who was elected Jackson County Commissioner in 1988, a role in which she served for 16 years. More recently Sue has been focused on heading up fundraising to rebuild the Butte Creek Mill which is a water powered flour mill; and Lyn Hennion who *Worth* magazine named to their list of the “Best Financial Advisers” in the country three times.

From the very beginning, it was determined that this event would focus on practical application, not a theory of leadership. The founders sought to inspire more women to step into leadership roles in business and community locally. Although the focus was women supporting women, the committee elected to define the mission more broadly. The mission of the Women’s Leadership Conference of Southern Oregon is ***To foster leadership in business, government, and non-profit organizations, that more fully reflects our community.***

The WLC vision statement is ***Working collaboratively to empower, educate, and develop emerging leaders to impact our community and achieve equality.***

The Women’s Leadership Conference strives not only to encourage women to lead; it aims to encourage women to use their voices to ensure leadership opportunities for all.

Neither the mission nor the vision statements call out a gender specific goal for the WLC; and both support equity and inclusion of all genders and gender identities.

President Simone Stewart recalls how she originally joined the first WLC Marketing committee: “The first Women’s Leadership Conference took place in 2013, only 11 months after the idea took hold with our *founding mothers*. I was the Marketing Director for John L Scott Real Estate at the time. One of our most altruistic and philanthropic Real Estate Agents, Jolie Johnson, approached me and said ‘Simone, there’s going to be a Women’s Leadership Conference; John L Scott is going to be one of the sponsors, and they need Marketing help. You’ll help them put together some marketing materials, won’t you?’ I never say no to Jolie. If she asked me to jump, I’d ask her ‘how high?’ Unfortunately, Jolie passed away in a tragic accident in February 2015. Since 2018, The Women’s Leadership Conference bestows an award on a local community leader who exemplifies Jolie’s spirit of being the voice for underserved communities; and helping to make a positive impact on the

community's most vulnerable populations." If you know of a woman community leader you'd like to nominate for the Jolie Johnson Award, the nomination form is on our website and is due April 9.

Each year, our conference has a theme and our speakers' presentations are centered on that theme. This year our theme is Embracing Change. In a typical year, we would hold three micro-events in addition to our annual conference. This year is an atypical year; but we are fortunate that we have been able to provide our micro events virtually. Our last micro-event titled: Embracing Change: Resiliency on a professional, personal and regional level can be watched on our YouTube Channel and owner of Medford CoWork Collective, Abigail Schilling participated on our panel.

Our next micro event is on April 1st and is titled ***Embracing Change: Empowering Women to Propel Forward Through Connection, Inclusion and Support***. We have one presenter, the incomparable Andrea Berryman Childreth (daughter of Lindsay Berryman). What is the recipe for achieving optimum success? As women, what barriers hold us back? Our speaker, Andrea Berryman Childreth, will share her story of shame, stigma and exclusion and how she harnessed connection and inclusion to overcome adversity and cultivate community and change.

The main event, the Women's Leadership annual conference will take place on Friday May 7 starting at 8:30am. Cost is \$85 per person, \$25 for students, and need-based Scholarships are available, dropping the cost of the conference to \$10 for scholarship recipients. There's a scholarship application on our website and the deadlines to apply for scholarships is April 9.

WLC 2021 keynote speaker is TV and Comic Book Writer Kelly Sue DeConnick. Kelly Sue's keynote title is *Superheroes, Art, and Visible Women*.



Kelly Sue DeConnick is the iconic comic book and television writer whose long run on Marvel's Captain Marvel inspired the record-breaking 2019 film starring Brie Larson. She's also an outspoken feminist activist who is on a mission to make art that truly reflects the world around us. Her fiery keynotes challenge us to engage critically with the media we consume, get comfortable with being uncomfortable, and do anything we can to make our voices heard. "What I bring to the table matters," she says. "I know that heroes—even the really gothy ones—don't limit themselves to battles they know that they can win."

Kelly Sue DeConnick is a comic book and television writer. Her long run writing Marvel's Captain Marvel put

Carol Danvers in the Captain's role and inspired the 2019 film that made over a billion dollars at the box office. She served as a consultant and also appeared in the film.

In addition to her two award-winning independent series, *Pretty Deadly* and *Bitch Planet*, she currently writes *Aquaman* for DC and develops television for Legendary TV. Her writing has been nominated for *Eisner* and *Hugo* awards.

Our closing keynote is Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Artistic Director, Nataki Garrett. Nataki has had to literally embrace change since being hired by OSF, just before COVID cancelled her first season as Artistic Director and she has had to re-invent how audiences would be able to connect with OSF without being allowed to have live audiences.



Nataki Garrett is Oregon Shakespeare Festival's sixth artistic director. As the former associate artistic director of CalArts Center for New Performance, Garrett has been hailed as a champion of new work as well as an experienced, savvy arts administrator. 2019 was Garrett's first season at OSF, where she directed *How to Catch Creation*. At CalArts, Garrett oversaw all operations of conservatory training and produced mainstage, black box, developmental projects, plays, co-productions and touring productions. She is currently on the nominating committee for *The Kilroys*, and she recently served on the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust Distinguished Playwright Award nominating committee and the Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship panel.

Garrett is a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts and Theatre Communications Group Career Development Fellowship for Theatre Directors and a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. Garrett is also a member of the board of directors for Theatre Communications Group, a company member at Woolly Mammoth and an advisory board member for Mixed Blood Theatre.

Garrett is a graduate of California Institute of the Arts with an MFA in directing.

The conference features eight more speakers from seven different cities. Their names and session titles are:

Erin O'Kelley Muck *Taking the Leap into Entrepreneurship*

Kate Ingram *Change and The Soul*

Cynthia Scherr *Catching Courage*

Michelle Hynes *Navigating Work-Life Fit in Midlife and Beyond*

Diahana Barnes *Leading Change: Strategic Communications as a Feminine Leader*

Elizabeth Miner *Empowered Women In A Changing World*

Dr. Sheree Bryant Sekou *What a Difference a Change Makes: Beginning Again*

Joy Taylor *Intuition at Work: The Ultimate Leverage for Navigating the Great Unknown*

The conference is set up so that attendees choose between two speakers, in four different sessions during the day: two sessions before lunch and two sessions after lunch. The sessions will be recorded and attendees will be able to watch the session they were unable to attend on the conference site with their password for up to 45 days after the conference. Attendees will be able to re-watch conference sessions for up to 45 days after the conference.

Social Media Handles

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