

Consumer Shows

Women Get What They Want

It's not every day that U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor gives a live interview to ABC News' Barbara Walters. But at least every year California women can rely on an educational and inspirational day at the annual **California Governor & First Lady's Conference on Women and Families**.

The 19th annual event, in its 11th year at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center Oct. 27, attracted 11,000 attendees (99 percent women) to hear legends like O'Connor and Walters – not to mention actress Jane Fonda and tennis pioneer Billie Jean King – discuss today's pressing women's issues.

Conference participants also traversed a jam-packed tradeshow floor with 240 exhibiting companies and honored four California women, including former U.S. first lady Betty Ford, with Minerva Awards for their humanitarian efforts.

The conference is organized each year by the state's current first lady. For her second first lady's conference, Maria Shriver enlisted the help of several California-based event production firms like Ambrosia Productions from Malibu, Universal Odyssey from Newport Beach and Dewey Square Group from Sacramento.

The organizers chose the conference tagline, "Women as Architects of Change," and had one primary objective for the day, said Universal Odyssey's Michelle Voetberg, who served as exhibit show manager: "To get (women) more information on how to better their lives every day."

The 148,000 net square foot showfloor spread over two halls, making it 65 percent larger than last year's single-hall exhibition. The exhibits supported the event's mission in several ways.

Exhibitors like Richard Farrell, CFO of Laguna Beach, Calif.-based firm SunMilk, offered attendees ways to make healthier consumption choices.

Technology firm 3M sponsored skin cancer screenings; cosmetics giant Estee Lauder promoted breast cancer awareness with bracelet giveaways; and attendees had opportunities to indulge in guilty pleasures on the showfloor by shopping Nordstrom's 2,500 sq. ft. booth

BY RACHELLE CRUM

and visiting Target's freestanding exhibit for free makeovers and haircuts.

The expanded showfloor was a hit, Voetberg said, because it allowed sponsors a larger presence. "They brought their big booths, and that brought the exhibit hall up a notch," she said.

Designated sections of the showfloor this year included a California Marketplace sponsored by grocery chain Safeway, a Volunteer Village to showcase charity groups and a bookstore featuring book signings by event speakers.

And although corporate exhibitors captured the attention of most visitors, smaller firms with newly launched products like SunMilk and Goal Diggers clothing reaped the benefits of their exposure to thousands of ambitious women – their key demographic.

Farrell called the conference "an excellent opportunity to explain our message." To best showcase his product, he handed out 1,300 samples of SunMilk during the show and awarded a door prize of free SunMilk for a year to one attendee.

Exhibiting in her second tradeshow, Los Angeles-based Goal Diggers President and founder Rachel Pusateri said she wasn't adequately prepared for the showfloor crowds. "I didn't bring enough business cards. I didn't bring enough bags. I didn't realize it was going to be this fabulous," she said.

Ellen Schwartz, director of sales and marketing for the SMG-operated convention center, said she is impressed all over again



Actress-author Jane Fonda, California first lady Maria Shriver and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor spoke about personal experiences at the California Governor & First Lady's Conference on Women and Families.

every year by the event, especially its use of each of the convention center's buildings.

"It lets us showcase all of our facilities in one event. It's probably the most comprehensive event that we have," Schwartz said.

Before it landed in Long Beach, the conference was staged at Los Angeles' Westin Bonaventure Hotel, the Santa Clara Convention Center and the Anaheim Marriott.

And although many conference attendees traveled from as far away as Northern California for the daylong event, Long Beach natives were abundant.

Kathy Thompson, a staff analyst for Boeing in nearby Seal Beach, said she has attended the conference for the past three years because it is a must-attend event.

"You get to grow and be challenged and network with other women," she said. "Every time I come, I always take something back."

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Fellow Long Beach resident Linda Jacobson, office manager for Tom's Aircraft Maintenance, said she chose to attend the conference for the second consecutive time partly because of its proximity. "It's kind of silly not to go. It's in my own backyard," she said. Plus, Jacobson added, "You get to see very inspirational and motivating speakers."

Speakers like Anne Sweeney, co-chairwoman of Disney Media Networks and president of the Disney-ABC Television Group, encouraged attendees to create opportunities for themselves during the televised opening session. "Someone asked me the other day if leadership could be taught. I said I thought it could be triggered. Let today trigger you," she said.

Shriver candidly told the opening session audience how she helps herself overcome anxiety. "Snap out of it, girlfriend," she said she tells herself. "If you can survive a bipartisan marriage, you can survive anything," she added, recognizing her Kennedy family's Democratic tradition and husband Arnold Schwarzenegger's Republican affiliation.



■ California women's conference attendees listened to California first lady Maria Shriver, NBC News special correspondent Tom Brokaw, television producer Linda Ellerbee and ABC News correspondent Barbara Walters discuss prominent women's issues.

corrected Walters a few times on her research. "Thank you. This is the end of the interview," Walters jokingly told O'Connor after a second factual correction.

Several other states, including Texas, have governor's conferences for women. The Sixth Annual Texas Conference for Women, hosted by Gov. Rick Perry and first lady Anita Perry, on Oct. 20 drew 7,000 women to the Austin Convention Center. The conference was modeled after the California conference, said Ruth Stergiou, a former organizer for both meetings. **TSW**

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