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EDITOR'S NOTE

A 1940s baby, I grew up in a **post-WWII world where women's roles were changing**—not that I understood it then. My father told me laughingly that if I could kiss my elbow I'd turn into a boy. The message was clear: being a boy was a good thing. Despite the beachhead Rosie the Riveter established in the wartime economy, it was a world where females had limitations—real or imagined.

Today women do it all and are a vital part of Tennessee's economy. In 1998 the Tennessee legislature created the **Tennessee Economic Council on Women (TECW)**, recognizing it is in the state's best interest to focus on this critical component of its labor force. The council's members, nominated by the governor and important public and private organizations, are charged with advocating for Tennessee's women and advancing their economic interests. Chair Margaret Jane Powers introduces this important issue, emphasizing the council's role in assessing the economic status of women, researching ways to improve it, and advocating policy options to accomplish that improvement. She notes that many women's earnings are inadequate to make them self-sufficient. Improving women's skills and overcoming barriers to their earning power could not only improve the lives of the women and their families but also reduce their need for a variety of public services funded by tax revenues.

Research presented in this issue offers **an economic profile of women in each of Tennessee's counties**, focusing on employment and earnings and economic autonomy. Women in the state earn only 75 cents for every dollar earned by men, but counties differ significantly. Earnings for women are significantly higher in urban counties, but the wage disparity is not necessarily less. Causes of gender disparity include deficiencies in training and education, women's choices of traditional work and career fields, and employment discrimination. Impacts of wage disparity weigh especially heavily on minority and senior women. Some disparities must be addressed through education and training, others by policies that eliminate employment and pay discrimination. A study focusing on training programs and job opportunities in Tennessee concludes women should be encouraged to seek training in nontraditional, high-demand, high-paying occupations. With the 2004 passage of the Tennessee Equal Pay Remedies and Reinforcement Act, advocated by the council, Tennessee became a national leader by escalating the damages employers pay affected employees for each act of discrimination. Other programs address the importance of providing young women with financial understanding and enhancing mentoring efforts.

A compelling part of the council's research concerns **the impact of domestic violence on the workplace and the economy**. Businesses suffer because of lost wages, sick leave, absenteeism, and lost productivity. Insurance companies report domestic violence increases the use and expense of healthcare services. Council research indicates that implementing programs and policies to diminish domestic violence costs less than the costs such violence imposes on the economy.

The development of Tennessee's workforce is a key to its future economic success. If Tennessee is to be competitive in the regional, national, and world economy, our labor force must be trained and productive. Investment in improving the education and performance of our female workforce can produce meaningful returns for us all. *Tennessee's Business* thanks the TECW for its cooperation in producing this issue. We are particularly grateful to Sally Govan, our tireless and talented editor, who has made this issue a personal labor of love. We salute the council and its efforts to make the future brighter for the state and for our women.

—Barbara S. Haskew, guest editor

CONTENTS

Tennessee Economic
Council on Women:
Advancing Women's
Economic Status **2**
Margaret Jane Powers

Mentoring and the Power
of Women Helping Women **3**
Wendy Pitts Reeves

A Financial Makeover **6**
Angelia Allen

The Impact of Domestic
Violence on Tennessee's
Economy **8**
*Carol B. Berz
and Lauren Howard*

Job Training for
Tennessee Women **13**
Lachelle Norris

Wage Disparity:
Still a Concern? **18**
Lauren Howard

The Status of Women in
Tennessee's Counties **21**
*Michelle Chambers
and Lauren Howard*

The Dean's View:
Opportunities for Women **29**
E. James Burton

