

Heart Beats: The Heart of the Women's Giving Circle of Cumberland County

What is The Women's Giving Circle & What Does It Mean to You?

Alexis C. Board

In 2004 a group of women in our community came together to plant the seed for what we now know as the Women's Giving Circle of Cumberland County. They spent years researching giving circles and how our community could benefit from them. They attended the North Carolina Conference for Women Givers in 2007 and came back with a wealth of knowledge ready to recruit and pave the way for collective giving in Cumberland County. Those ladies are Christin Bellian, Mary Lynn Bryan, Patty Collie, Michelle Courie, Alisa Debnam, Laura Devan, Margaret Dickson, Jean Harrison, Lucy Jones, Sarah Moorman, Terri Union, Kaki Van Sickle, Cynthia Wilson, and Denise Wyatt. As our founding members we felt it fitting to hear from them about what the WGCCC is and what it means to them.

Patty Collie is one of the founding members and is still an active member of the WGCCC. She is a financial advisor in Fayetteville, and is also a founding board member of Connections of Cumberland County. She is a lifelong resident of Cumberland County and heavily active in philanthropy and women's and children's needs in our community.

1. When you were first approached about the idea of a giving circle in Cumberland County what were your initial thoughts?

Patty Collie: I was invited by Mary Holmes to meet with a few other women to learn about giving circles. Jean Harrison and Terri Union had approached Mary about this. I was very excited to be part of this initial conversation. Being able to bring the concept of philanthropy to all women in the community, and especially to empower women who thought this was only for the wealthy. Being a good steward of the money you give to others in needs can bring such joy into your life. That was exciting!

2. Why did you decide to join the group of women in the founding of the Giving Circle?

PC: A big motivation for me was that the giving circle concept would give us the opportunity to build awareness that philanthropy can be more powerful if people of diverse socio and economic backgrounds join together to pool their donations to make a greater impact on focused areas. I believed that this would be a very empowering message for all the women who decided to join our group.

3. How has serving in leadership roles helped you understand what it is the WGCCC is about?

PC: There have been many benefits for me personally. First, I have gotten to know so many smart and talented women by serving in leadership roles. Making a difference together is really very uplifting and inspiring. Second, I have experienced great joy over the years as I saw that our founding vision was being executed in a manner that is inclusive and effective. Educating our members on focus areas for grants with the Annual Scorecard evolved into building community awareness which led to a call to action. This is exciting stuff! And we did it together!

4. How would you describe the WGCCC to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

PC: We are grant-making group that pools our money together to make a greater impact on focus areas that address basic needs of women and children in our community. This empowers our members to make a positive difference by making larger donations together.

5. Why should women join the WGCCC?

We seek is to **EMPOWER** women givers of all backgrounds, **EDUCATE** our community on women's Issues & **IMPACT** positive change by collective giving.

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PC: We would love to continue to build our membership with adult women of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. The more diversity we have in our membership, the more intelligent our decisions will be. Incorporating different perspectives and points of view makes us stronger and enables us to make choices in focus areas and grants that truly reflect the needs of women and children in our community.

6. Looking back on where you started and where we are today, is it what you envisioned the WGCCC would look like?

PC: Yes, and MORE! When you consider that the members of this giving circle have invested almost \$400,000 of grant funds in non-profits that are addressing the basic needs of women and children who need supportive services, you cannot help but feel pride.

Then, when you take into consideration that the endowment fund that WGC founders established in the very first year of operation has grown to be over \$130,000.00 you realize what an important factor the endowment is creating the legacy for WGC members and our community's next generation of giving circle philanthropists.

In addition, when you realize that this would not have been possible without the consistent support and encouragement from the Cumberland Community Foundation Board that has funded the administrative /operational support for the WGC which is delivered by the multi-talented Susan Barnes, you cannot help but feel tremendous gratitude!

7. Where would you like to see the WGCCC in 10 years?

PC: If we can grow to and sustain our membership number to 300 full (\$550 dues) members, the amount of grant money we could distribute annually grows to \$120,000 with \$30,000 going into the endowment fund. That would increase the annual impact significantly and create a legacy that will continue for many future generations.

8. Do you think Cumberland County has been impacted by the work of the giving circle? Please elaborate.

PC: Several years ago, we established an Evaluation Committee which receives and analyzes progress reports from the non-profits that receive our grant money. This annual process was established to make sure that the money granted was used for the purpose intended and to also gather impact data. We hope to begin incorporating this impact data in our annual scorecard. We continue to be committed to providing our WGC members the important facts about the needs in our community so we can make the best grant funding decisions possible. I am so proud of the work that has been done so far and am so excited about the innovations that will be introduced by future members!

Thank you Mrs. Patty Collie for your time and commitment to the Women's Giving Circle of Cumberland County and your community.

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