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of the Americas
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FACT SHEET: Women's Opportunity Awards

Organizational Profile

Founded in 1921, Soroptimist International of the Americas is an international volunteer service organization for business and professional women. Almost 100,000 Soroptimists in more than 120 countries and territories contribute time and financial support to community-based project benefiting women and girls.

Organizational Mission

Soroptimist's mission is to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.

Women's Opportunity Awards

The Women's Opportunity Awards program, Soroptimist's major service project, aids women seeking to improve their economic status by gaining additional skills, training and education. The program helps women who, as the primary wage earners for their families, must improve their employment status by entering or returning to the work force.

Women's Opportunity Awards applicants have faced severe hardships that have prevented them from pursuing and achieving their educational and professional goals. Most are single mothers and/or reliant on public assistance as their source of income. Many are domestic abuse survivors. The Women's Opportunity Awards helps these women rebuild their lives through improved employment opportunities.

This unique program supplies women with the resources they need to get ahead. Recipients may use the cash awards to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education, including tuition, books, supplies, childcare and car care.

Each year, more than \$800,000 is awarded through the Women's Opportunity Awards program. In 2001, The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) named Soroptimist to its honor roll for this program. In 2003, the Women's Opportunity Awards received the Award of Excellence from ASAE's Associations Advance America award program.

History

The Women's Opportunity Awards program was created in 1972 by popular vote of the Soroptimist membership. Because of their interest in "upward mobility for women," members voted overwhelmingly for the creation of an award for training or retraining that would enable women to obtain higher level jobs. In December 1997, the Soroptimist Board of Directors adopted the Women's Opportunity Awards as Soroptimist's major service project because the program best exemplifies the aims of the organization.

Program Structure

The program begins on the club level, where award amounts vary. Club-level recipients become eligible for additional awards at other levels of the organization. In addition, Soroptimist grants three \$10,000 finalist awards each year. Since the program's inception, Soroptimist has funded almost \$5.5 million in Women's Opportunity Awards and assisted about 1,640 women. In total (including local club activity), approximately \$15 million in Women's Opportunity Awards has been disbursed to about 22,500 women since the program began in 1972.

Public Awareness

Women's Opportunity Awards finalists were the focus of two *First for Women* magazine articles in 1999 and 2000. The first article told the story of Kathy Medley, a single mother of five who left an abusive marriage to make a better life for her family. With the help of the Women's Opportunity Awards and support from local Soroptimists, Medley turned her life around. She eventually earned a degree in dental hygiene and provided a financially and emotionally secure life for her children. Medley has since remarried and is a dental hygienist and the proud co-owner of a hardware store. In 2002, Soroptimist created a public service announcement (PSA) based on Medley's inspirational journey. The PSA earned an Award of Distinction in The Communicator Awards 2002 Video Competition, which recognizes excellence in the field of communications.

The second *First for Women* article introduced readers to Guadalupe Vidales, who emigrated from Mexico to the United States only to end up in a violent marriage. Vidales fled with her two children to a domestic violence shelter supported by a local Soroptimist club. Eventually she enrolled in college and with the help of the Women's Opportunity Awards earned a degree in psychology. Vidales, who organized domestic violence awareness programs at her university, went on to earn a Ph.D.

In 2002, Soroptimist and the Women's Opportunity Awards program were showcased on *Voices of Vision*, a televised documentary series on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). *Voices of Vision* featured individual stories of people who have been helped or affected by non-profit organizations. Women Helping Women: A Tradition of Service, the episode featuring Soroptimist, was beamed by satellite to PBS stations in the United States and Canada.

***Soroptimist International of Victor Valley
Woman's Opportunity Award***

***Please fill out the attached application in full
and return on or before***

Monday, January 15, 2007

***Please note: Date on the application must be
12-1-2006***

For further information contact:

Linda Jacobson
(Office) 760-843-8186
(Cell) 760-887-2355

Application

Women's Opportunity Awards

A program of Soroptimist International of the Americas

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Eligibility Requirements:

To be eligible for the Women's Opportunity Award, you must:

- 1) Be a woman with primary financial responsibility for supporting your family (including children, spouse, siblings and/or parents);
- 2) Attend or have been accepted to a vocational/skills training program, or an undergraduate degree program;
- 3) Have financial need;
- 4) Be motivated to achieve your educational and career goals;
- 5) Reside in one of Soroptimist International of the Americas' member countries and territories (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guam, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, United States of America, Venezuela).

Previous Women's Opportunity Awards recipients are ineligible to apply. Women who already have an undergraduate degree are ineligible to apply. Soroptimists, employees of Soroptimist, and the immediate families of both are ineligible to apply.

Please type or print neatly in dark ink.

The application with two completed reference forms must be received BY DECEMBER 15 at the address listed on the back page of this brochure. Applications submitted directly to Soroptimist headquarters will not be considered. Award recipients will be notified between January and June. Not all applicants to the program will be selected as recipients.

PART I—PERSONAL DATA

Name (last, first, middle initial)

Address (number and street address)

City/Province

State

Postal Code

Country

Telephone (area code first)

E-mail Address

Social Security Number (U.S.)

Date of Birth

Marital Status

Number of People Applicant Supports Financially

Relationship to Applicant (children, spouse, parent, etc.)

Ages (if children)

PART II—CAREER GOALS

A. Please list the school you are currently attending, or to which you have been accepted, and your proposed program of study (example: San Jose State University, four-year bachelor of science degree program in nursing).

B. When will you complete your program of study (month and year)?

C. Are you currently employed? (circle one) YES NO

If yes, how many hours per week do you work? _____

D. Using another sheet of paper, please describe (in 300 words or less) your career goals and how your education and/or skills training support those goals.

PART III—PERSONAL STATEMENT

The Women’s Opportunity Awards aid women who have faced economic and personal hardships, and are seeking to gain additional skills, training and education. The program helps women who serve as the primary wage earners for their families to enter or return to the work force, or to improve their employment status.

Using another sheet of paper, please tell us in 750 words or less how these statements apply to you, and why you would make a deserving Women’s Opportunity Award recipient.

PART IV—FINANCIAL NEED

The Women’s Opportunity Awards are given based in part on financial need. Your total income will be compared to your total annual expenses. Please be as exact as you can.

A. Total annual household income from all sources (include your income from employment, savings, child support, alimony, Social Security benefits, and school loans or scholarships. Also include all income received by any other household members).

B. Please list your annual educational expenses only—do not include those of your children or other family members.

Tuition/School Fees _____ Books _____

Other (please describe) _____

C. Please list your family’s annual living expenses in the chart below.

Housing \$ _____ per year	Utilities \$ _____ per year
Food \$ _____ per year	Medical \$ _____ per year
Childcare \$ _____ per year	Transportation \$ _____ per year
Other (please list additional expenses and assign a dollar value to each in the spaces below)	
Expense: _____	\$ _____ per year
Expense: _____	\$ _____ per year
Expense: _____	\$ _____ per year
Total expenses per year \$ _____	

PART V—REFERENCES

Using the enclosed reference forms, please submit two references (from persons not related to you) with your completed application. Applications received without two references will not be considered.

PART VI—AGREEMENT

- I certify that all information provided in this application is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I will notify the designated club to which I have submitted this application if there are any changes.
- I understand that this award is not a scholarship and is therefore taxable for citizens of the United States. (For more information, consult IRS publication 520. Recipients in other countries should check their local tax laws.)
- I certify that this is the only application I have made this year for a Women’s Opportunity Award from this or any other Soroptimist club.
- I understand that my application becomes the property of Soroptimist International of the Americas. The application will be considered confidential, unless the applicant grants Soroptimist written permission to release personal information for the purpose of publicizing the Women’s Opportunity Awards program.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Submitted to: _____

(Please provide the name of the sponsoring Soroptimist club listed on the back page of the brochure.)

Reference form

Women's Opportunity Awards

A program of Soroptimist International of the Americas

Name of Applicant _____

(Applicant: Please fill in your name before giving this sheet to the person writing your reference.)

Thank you for taking the time to provide this reference for a Women's Opportunity Award applicant. The Women's Opportunity Awards program gives women the resources they need to improve their education, skills and employment prospects. Please use your personal knowledge of this candidate to respond to the following questions (please type or print legibly; limit your answers to the space provided; additional pages cannot be considered):

1. How long have you known the candidate, and in what capacity (employer, school instructor, friend, etc.)?

2. Please rate the candidate in the following areas, based upon your knowledge of her achievements and strengths. A score of "1" means that you "strongly disagree" with the statement; a score of "5" means that you "strongly agree" with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
A. The applicant is motivated.	1	2	3	4	5	*
B. The applicant has demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5	*
C. The applicant has demonstrated strength in character.	1	2	3	4	5	*
D. The applicant has clear goals.	1	2	3	4	5	*
E. The applicant would be an inspiration to others.	1	2	3	4	5	*

3. Please tell us what you believe to be the candidate's particular strengths in her personal, educational, or professional life. Be as specific as you can, and give examples of particular accomplishments.

4. What is your knowledge of the candidate's educational goals, and her progress toward achieving these goals? Consider any barriers or difficulties she has overcome.

5. Is there any additional information we should know about this applicant in regard to this award program?

COMPLETED BY (Please return completed reference form to the applicant for submission with her application.)

Name

Date

Title

Organization

Address

Telephone



SOROPTIMIST

Best for Women

Reference form

Women's Opportunity Awards

A program of Soroptimist International of the Americas

Name of Applicant _____

(Applicant: Please fill in your name before giving this sheet to the person writing your reference.)

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