



# Monthly News



December 2025

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## CEO's Corner



Dear Supporters & Friends:

There's lots of news to unpack from Victoria's and my October trip to Toronto where we attended the Worldwide Affiliates Conference.

First, it was announced that Joanie Bily is now confirmed Worldwide CEO having initially served as interim CEO. Numerous times in her presentation she cited DFSPB as one of the "premier" network members. What's more, one of our original initiatives – Employment Packs – was highlighted, with other affiliates encouraged to incorporate the concept when completing a full week's employment styling appointment. Our Employment Pack was developed to send a client off not only with her new wardrobe but also with a few essentials that might prove useful before that first paycheck arrives. A thermal lunch box is packed with some toiletries, gas or transit card, Publix card, and a small token gift: A "More Than the Dress" lapel pin. Several attendees expressed interest in replicating the idea for their local chapters.

With Joanie's official start comes also the introduction of a DFS Brand Refresh that's been in the works for well over a year. It includes a new, more dynamic and modernized logo that conveys strength and confidence. And there's a whole new outlook on how we define our organization and communicate that both internally and to external audiences. Here are the basics:



Palm  
Beaches

New Tagline: **Igniting Careers. Transforming Futures.**

New Vision Statement: **Our vision is a world where women thrive in work and in life**

New Purpose Statement: **Empower women to achieve economic mobility by providing a global network of support, workplace attire, and career and life skills for success.**

Additionally, there's a *suggested* new vocabulary. (Suggested but not necessarily absolute, since Worldwide welcomes us to submit alternatives for consideration.)

Here's some of what was presented:

USE THIS	NOT THAT
Global Member Network	Affiliate Network
Network Member	Affiliate
Styling	Suiting
Women we serve/empower	Clients
Center	Boutique
Economic Mobility	Economic Independence
Purpose	Mission
Workplace Attire	Professional Attire
Leading Resource for advancing women in the workforce globally	Leader in Women's Empowerment
Leading Resource for women in the workplace underemployed	Leading Resource for unemployed and workplace underemployed
Female head of household	Single mother
Financial Education	Financial Literacy
Career and Life Skills	Coaching or Career Coaching

Some of the changes are subtle; others more surprising (i.e., Center vs. Boutique is unsettling for some of us.) Worldwide is scheduling a gradual rollout of these changes in the coming year, along with a campaign, "Success Starts Now," focused on the critical issue of shortening the timeline to achieve gender pay equity.

Here at DFSPB we've already begun to embrace these changes, along with some shifts in our day-to-day operations catalyzed by our relocation and expansion. Most notably, we have added Thursdays for stylist-client appointments – now that we have a separate backdoor drop-off area where clothing donations and sorting won't interfere. While we're still largely reliant on partner social service agencies to refer women in need to us, we're also helping those who come to our door without that kind of vetting. We have plenty of clothing and accessories to offer, and we've got a great team of savvy stylists available. Our HR expert, Dr. Nethel Stephens, has been meeting individually with each volunteer stylist to ensure she's comfortable interacting with an individual who might have mental health issues that present themselves during an appointment. The safety of our volunteers is primary, as it is for anyone who enters our space. At the same time, the dignity of our clients must be upheld. So, training for our personal stylists is being reevaluated to answer this significant policy change in accepting clients.

Yes, it's a new era of Dress for Success – with its global reach amplified, a revitalized image, and a stirring "Success Starts Now" push for the empowerment of women more than ever before. Are you, like me, excited by this evolution and the prospects to have an even greater impact? I look forward to continuing our work together in 2026.

Enjoy your holidays.

Forever grateful,

*Joe Ann Fletcher*

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# A Message from Our Board Chair

**Bernadette O'Grady**

Season's Greetings, Everyone!

The holidays are upon us and while it's easy to feel overwhelmed with shopping, buying, cooking, wrapping and decorating – the true reason we do all of that is to show our families and friends how grateful we are to have them in our lives. We want to make them feel special and loved. It's gratitude for what we have, and the people who make what we have possible.

We are grateful for our wonderful volunteers and the time (6,266 hours as of October and counting) that they give to help the women who come to us. And we're so very grateful for the equally generous individuals, businesses and foundations that donate the funds that allowed us to move to an expanded center where we can create a beautiful and welcoming environment for our services and continuing education programs. I have been on the Dress for Success Board of Directors since 2011 and I can honestly say that back then, none of us dared envision what we have created today. It is simply an amazing feat of what determination can do when harnessed and channeled for such a worthy cause.

And we reserve the biggest "Thank You" and expression of gratitude for our amazing CEO Joe Ann Fletcher and the incomparable staff of Dress for Success Palm Beaches. From Victoria Velez who keeps our operations fine tuned and running, to Nina Jakubowski who leads our programs and manages our outreach to agency partners and potential resources...from Maria Bacas-Cook who coordinates the efforts of our enthusiastic volunteers to Alexandra Shatara who manages our Belle Glade operations so successfully and helps us create inroads in a community that truly needs the services we can provide. It is these five women who form the DFSPB Dream Team and ensure we're a thriving, relevant, nonprofit delivering on our promises. We couldn't ask for more dedicated and genuine people to represent what we do and how we support the women of this community.

Our sincere appreciation also to everyone reading this newsletter. Whether you donated financial resources, clothing, time or personal services, shopped one of our pop-up sales, hosted a Sip'n Shop or clothing collection to benefit DSFPB, helped us move to the new location, or recommended us to someone who needed our help – you helped us empower more than 1,500 women in our community to move forward. You helped us better their lives and the lives of their families.

As George Bailey learned many years ago in the movie "It's A Wonderful Life" – there is no greater gift to open or tradition to enjoy than knowing that someone's life was made better because of you. That's really the true meaning of the season.

Happy holidays to all of you. I hope you get to spend quality time with the ones you love during this season of gratitude.

Warm regards,

**Bernadette O'Grady**

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## **Holiday Cheer**

We kicked off the holiday season with a celebration of our extraordinary volunteers. More than 50 were on hand for the December 9th festivities at Ruth's Chris Steak House, and several were honored for their above-and-beyond service. Using the gathering as the occasion to now award the annual Volunteer of the Year (previously presented at the March "Style for Hope" luncheon), **Paula Howard** and **Aimee Shaughnessy** were named recipients. Paula, unable to attend the soiree, was cited for her continuous contributions as career coach, event staffer, and for always being there when we need her, even while battling a serious health issue this past year. Aimee has been a behind-the-scenes worker bee for more than a decade, producing this monthly newsletter and helping with web management – all while juggling a full-time C-suite role at a major marketing agency and as caregiver for her parents. Talk about women power! And these are just 2 among the dozens of you who give so generously of your time. We are incredibly fortunate and sincerely thank you.



*Volunteer of the Year  
Aimee Shaughnessy and  
Joe Ann Fletcher*



*Kara de Pool, Shari Alexios,  
Tirzah Gabourel, Merle Davis*



*Seated: Pat Williams, Annette Sohn, Nilda  
Morales  
Standing: Ellen Bernstein, Shirelle Francis,  
Maria Baras-Cook*

## Road to Success Graduation

Twenty-two women completed the final Road to Success term of the year, with 15 now EMPLOYED!!! Among those celebrated at the November 13th graduation festivities were:

Marisol Pineda who has a job as a Dental Assistant at Precision Esthetics Dental Laboratory; Leann Elges, who now is a Retail Associate at Macy's; and, Joan McDonald, who joined Monster Reservations Group as a call center agent.

We're already ramping up for the 1st term of 2026, which begins February 4. And we're in need of volunteer mentors able to dedicate each Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. until 3 p.m for the 6 consecutive weeks of the series. Mentors also are expected to spend some one-on-one time with their assigned mentee to ensure they're understanding each of the job readiness and life skills lesson modules: Identifying their strengths and skill sets; resume writing; mastering the interview; personal image; and leveraging the internet, A.I., and job search platforms like Indeed and LinkedIn.

"I've been a Road to Success mentor since 2021, paired with nearly 2 dozen women," said Rhonda Russell. "It's an incredibly fulfilling experience. I'm awed by the transformation that takes place as they begin the program with little confidence and uncertain how to move their lives forward, but wind up with such a can-do, indomitable spirit. And, of course, there's nothing more rewarding than when they announce they have a job!"

Learn more about the Road to Success program from Nina Jakubowski, [njakubowski@dressforsuccesspb.org](mailto:njakubowski@dressforsuccesspb.org).



*Barbara Estime, Joe Ann Fletcher, and mentor  
Candice Bucknor*



*Mentor Cathy Bergsman, Joe Ann Fletcher and  
Pauline Thomas*



*Leann Elges, Joe Ann Fletcher and mentor  
Christy Suerth*

# Our \$INCERE THANKS

We're winding down 2025 with some major funding and donations for which we are deeply grateful.

**Community Foundation of Broward County** is endowing us with a \$150,000 grant (\$50,000 per year) over the next three years. Huge thanks to Sheri Brown Grosvenor for helping to shepherd our proposal and advocating for us. We are increasing our services in Broward and launching our Road to Success. (More about this in our next newsletter issue.)

**Christine Quinn**, a perennially generous donor, visited our new digs with her and our dear friend Ellen Gorringer, bringing a \$25,000 check to continue the funding of our Scholarship Program.



*Ellen Gorringer, Joe Ann Fletcher, Christine Quinn*

**J. McLaughlin** on Worth Avenue held a sip-n-shop event hosted by our ever-faithful brand ambassadors Angela Manfredi and Toni May, along with Jack Lynch, J. McL's vp of retail marketing. It resulted in proceeds of over \$500. And newly opened **Set Point**, a specialty shop for golf, tennis and athleisure wear on Dixie Highway in West Palm Beach, raised \$400 for us thanks to a Sip-n-Shop event celebrating its debut.

**ZimVie**, an ongoing supporter, gifted us with 30 new laptop computers that will be programmed with the Road to Success curriculum and available for use by our RTS enrollees each session. This amazing windfall is thanks to our longtime tech guru and newly elected Board member, Tizah Gabourel,

Topping off significant funding this year were repeat supporters: **Batchelor Foundation** and **Gadsby Family Fund**. And, we once again have a shot at winning \$100,000 having been selected among 30+ other worthy nonprofits participating in the **Great Charity Challenge**. It's a unique equestrian team competition, and we've qualified automatically for \$15,000. Learn more about this one-of-a-kind fundraiser [www.greatcharitychallenge.com](http://www.greatcharitychallenge.com).

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# ONE NIGHT ONE COMMUNITY

## \$2 MILLION TO CHARITY

**Saturday, January 31, 2026**

At Wellington International

**Gates Open at 6PM**

**Free General Admission**

[www.GreatCharityChallenge.com](http://www.GreatCharityChallenge.com)



## An Unexpected Honor

It's untypical for one nonprofit organization to award another. But agency partner – Pace Center for Girls – created a Community Cares Award especially to honor Dress for Success Palm Beaches, and they presented the inaugural prize to Joe Ann Fletcher at the organization's Believing in Girls Empowerment Luncheon on November 13. With more than 300 guests in attendance, Pace Executive Director Mindy Hanken cited DFSPB for its mutual goals in support of women and girls and for the delivery of our services and programs for Pace participants and grads.



*Cathy Kasten, Victoria Velez,  
Maria Cook, Ellen Gorringer,  
Bernadette O'Grady,  
Joe Ann Fletcher, Nina Jakubowski, Esther Perman, Alexandra  
Shatara*



*Robin Cutler, Faith Meyer, Cathy Kasten, Beth Long*

## A Well-Earned Honor

Cathy Kasten, who has headed our Career Coaching team of volunteers the past 3 years and who's among our ever-ready vols whatever the occasion or need (RTS mentor, Personal Stylist, Pop-Up staffer, admin asst., Speakers Bureau & Education Committee member), was DFSPB's nominee for the Woman Volunteer of the Year presented by the Boca Raton Junior League on November 21. When we added it up, we found there is no other DFSPB volunteer who interfaces directly with as many of our participants as Cathy. She was one of 40 nominees from around the county who were spotlighted for their community service and feted by the audience of 1000+ at the 38th annual luncheon. Kudos, Cathy, and sincere thanks for your unending contributions.

## Holiday Pop-Up

'Twas the first Pop-Up Sale held in our new location... 'twas in the nick of time for the holidays...and 'twas a resounding success to the tune of netting more than \$24,000! Led once again by our co-chairs Rhonda Russell and Marlene Feldman with help from others on the inventory/merchandising team – Tamra Brandt, Alison Burckhardt, Esther Perman and Wendy Tannenbaum, they cleverly configured the new space into a shoppable experience enjoyed by nearly 220 bargain hunters. Before the doors even opened, a line wrapped around the building with close to 50 paying for the Early Bird entry opportunity. The most amazing crew of volunteer “sale associates” ensured it all went smoothly, and people already are asking when's the next one? See you in the Spring!



*Waiting in line for the Pop-Up to open.*



*Wendy Tannenbaum and Marlene Feldman help a shopper with her purchases.*



*Shoes and handbags in a room of their own.*



*Prices were slashed unbelievably low.*





*Worldwide CEO Joanie Bily being filmed  
for "Empowered" video*

DFSPB's spectacular new space was the choice setting for the December 4th filming of a promotional video being produced for DFS Worldwide. And, several of the women we serve as well as our volunteers are also starring in the "Empowered" short-form documentary. The resulting 3-to-5-minute segment is introduced by actress Meg Ryan. It will be distributed for airing to Public Television stations nationwide. Additionally, an edited 1-minute version will be issued for use by networks such as CNBC, CNN, Discovery and Discovery Life, Fox Business Network, Bloomberg, The Learning Channel, and Lifetime. To top it off, we'll have streaming rights to post on our internet platforms. So, stay tuned for the final cut due out this Spring.



Circle of Impact (COI) is the leading initiative for individual giving, asking donors for a minimum \$1,000 pledge. It's a commitment that helps DFSPB deliver on its mission of empowering women to achieve financial independence and stability in their lives.

Formed in 2019, COI has grown from 40 charter members to more than 80, and their combined giving has significantly added to the foundation grants and funding raised by DFSPB supporting its workforce readiness programs and other services.

In a show of appreciation, COI members throughout the year are invited to exclusive experiential events, themed receptions, and networking opportunities, often at private residences or distinctive venues and occasionally featuring presentations from guest authors, experts, or talents.

Click on the link below, see the range of Membership Levels, and help change a woman's life today.

[Become a Member](#)

We are pleased to recognize the following Circle of Impact members who contributed \$2,500 or more at the following levels over the past year:

**Diamond**

Brittany Castillo  
Chris Quinn  
Debra Kelly-Ennis  
Dee & Tommy Hilfiger  
Donna Kress  
Elissa Greenberg  
Ellen Bernstein  
Steve Ehrhart  
Ellen Goringe  
Esther Perman  
JoAnne Greiser  
Karen Masciarella  
Kelly Merbler  
Susan Levine  
Sylvia Golden

**Pearl**

Caren Rose Wishner  
David Hochberg  
Faith Meyer  
Ilene Golembiovsky  
Jana Hesser  
Joannie Danielides  
Lyn Houston  
Bernadette O'Grady  
Marci Schoenbach  
Wendy Tannenbaum  
Nancy Rizzuto  
Patricia Dautch  
Zelda Mason

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*Additional Ways to*

**SUPPORT US**



**Company Matching Grants**

Many organizations offer a company match program for donations made by their employees to nonprofit organizations, and some even offer volunteer grants. If your employer offers such programs, please consider requesting a donation to Dress for Success Palm Beaches.

**Charitable Bequest**

Leave a legacy! Please consider adding a charitable bequest to our organization to your will. **Be sure to designate our organization by our full name: Dress for Success Palm Beaches.**

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**Business  
Partners**



[Donate](#)

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