

Few women work for 'pin money' according to employment survey

By KETA STEEBBS

Their goal is to help the lot of the working woman in every possible way.

Some call it "Mission Impossible" but Toni Christenson and Joanne Ator think otherwise. Since January, these two young women have been familiarizing other Door county women with the purpose of their fledgling program titled "Women's Employment Project."

Although Toni and Joanne are admittedly breaking through new ground, both women feel they are gradually making headway. So far they've spent a good part of their waking hours exploring Door county's job market, compiling statistics, calling meetings, interviewing employers, conducting phone surveys and performing a number of diversified duties lumped under the all encompassing "out-reach" category.

Mostly, however, they've been listening.

Toni and Joanne have heard women vent their frustrations by the hour. They've heard how difficult it is for Door county's female population to break into jobs traditionally held by men and how, because of a deep, ingrained distrust of the so called "feminine mystique" some employers prefer not to hire women period.

The impossibility of convincing doubtful personnel managers they are not out to earn a little pin money for new kitchen curtains, discourages many women.

"Especially those," says Joanne, "who are solely responsible for their families' welfare."

Women speak freely of past and present job experiences at informal meetings being held throughout the county. While not intended to be "rap sessions" or encounter groups, participants (ranging in age from 18 to 60) are asked to list the jobs they have held and comment on their feelings. Discussions invariably support Joanne's rapidly growing file of statistics.

Women invariably held, or are holding, minimum wage jobs traditionally assigned to the "weaker sex." Some lists are lengthy, some almost pathetic in their brevity, but almost all include baby sitting, waitress work, housekeeping, clerking, typing, motel-hotel work and answering the phone.

Women employed on a seasonal basis say their earnings make the difference between just getting by and being able to save a bit for a rainy day. Unemployment insurance helps.

Most women workers feel they are on a dead end street. Higher paid, male oriented jobs are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain although some local industries, notably shipyards, are finding women an asset. Women have proven their ability to weld, drill and do metal work but few, if any, are employed as carpenters, electricians, pipefitters and plumbers.

"Women still have to fight tooth and nail to get training, skills and an education in "non-traditional" areas," says Toni. "Even when they've acquired necessary skills, they still have to overcome the employment hurdle."

American families have incomes supplemented by women and 19 per cent of Wisconsin's women are, heads of households. Women no longer (if they ever did) work solely for pin money.

"Unfortunately," says Joanne, "the majority still work for peanuts."

Sponsored by the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) at the request of the local chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) the Women's Employment Project has a multi-fold purpose. Joanne and Toni are encouraging women to assess their interests, abilities and experiences in preparation for a change in careers or, in the case of displaced homemakers, a first-time job.

Self development is also high on the team's priority list along with skill-sharing and interview preparation. It should be noted that Toni is a trained counselor and Joanne had a double degree in elementary education and psychology. Each is in a position to help women help themselves.

help sort out the right one," Joanne smiles. "Toni and I act as a clearing house for women who don't know what direction to proceed."

Confessing they are eager to begin talking with women's service clubs and other civic organizations, Joanne and Toni asked to have their phone numbers included with this article. Women interested in learning more about this unique project are asked to call Toni at 868-3417 or Joanne at 868-3352.

Both women live in the Egg Harbor area and although they hadn't met until the Women's Employment Project was initiated they are obviously compatible. They make, as one observer aptly phrased it, "a dynamic duo."

Crediting NOW President Barbara Stoner with laying the groundwork for their ambitious enterprise, Toni and Joanne find it impossible to conceal their enthusiasm. They do want it explained, however, that women wishing to attend meetings are not being asked to join a club nor are they placed under any type of obligation. All four meetings held so far have attracted different women with a common bond.

They'd like better jobs and more of them.



Toni Christenson, left, and Joanne Ator, coordinators of the Women's Employment Project, study statistics showing that Door county's unemployment rate for women is one of the highest in the state. The rate for unemployed women is 10.7 per cent compared with 6.5 per cent for men.

"Our outreach is a two-way street," says Toni. "We're conducting a phone survey this Friday (March 31) from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. to hear what more women have to say regarding job experiences and related social problems."

The latter, she explains, includes the need for responsible child care, more flexible working arrangements and a sharing of household responsibilities.

"Women help us by supplying information we can't get from agencies," Joanne adds. "In return, we explain parts of the affirmative action program most citizens (men and women) aren't aware of. We