

arts & entertainment

## Foundation will toast "women helping women"

By Dana Coffield  
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Swanee Hunt's \$250,000 set the tone for the group's fundraising. (AP | Hans Punz)

A painful legislative battle that dismantled the Colorado Commission on Women still ringing in their ears, mover-shakers Joy Burns, Martha Ezzard, Julia Fitz-Randolph, Josie Heath, Swanee Hunt, Dottie Lamm and Fern Portnoy sat down

and decided to do something outside of the reach of political squabbling to help Colorado women.

Now, 20 years later, the Women's Foundation of Colorado will toast its own steady march toward the goal of ensuring that "every woman in Colorado is economically self-sufficient and every girl in Colorado is on the path to economic self-sufficiency in adulthood" at a luncheon today to be attended by 2,700 men and women from all over the state.

Expect Hunt, who laid down \$250,000 to serve as an example to other potential foundation donors, to be first in line with the cheers. After helping to get the foundation going, she was named ambassador to Austria, became an expert in the role of women in post-Communist Europe and launched "Vital Voices: Women in Democracy," a conference of 320 female leaders from 29 countries.

Now director of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University, Hunt says she thinks of herself as the first woman whose life was radically changed by the foundation.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: What I learned in Colorado, I took with me to Austria, where I began to see women as change agents all around Eastern Europe, which had imploded after the fall of the Soviet Union. We had a lot of work to do.

Q: When the core organizers of the foundation

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came calling, it would have been easy enough to say no. Why did you get involved?

A: It was women helping women. We thought if women aren't helping women, why do we expect men to help women? I said let me know when you get organized. I'll write you a check for \$10,000.

Q: That set the stage for the fabled "ask" by Josie Heath.

A: She said: "Rightly or wrongly, people perceive you as flush. Your gift will be what people measure their own gifts against." I thought she was crazy.

Q: Even if you are flush, a quarter of a million is a lot of money.

A: We believed in economic self-sufficiency for women. If we weren't willing to talk the money talk, how could we deal with money with women and girls? We really do have to help women get over their knees knocking when we talk about money.

Q: So the foundation got going with \$2 million in the bank, and now the endowment has grown to \$11 million and funds \$750,000 in grants each year. That must feel pretty good.

A: On Wednesday, when I stand up there for two minutes, and look out over the group, the best news is that I will know 3 percent of the people there. And the other 97 percent will be women and men who I have never met. The foundation

didn't stay dependent on a few of us.

Q: Any favorite projects pop to mind?

A: The transitional housing at Warren Village. After we funded them, we heard that the women who lived there had taken up a collection to fund something going on at the Women's Foundation. That was really heartwarming. It is all about stretching and giving back, to the extent that we aren't about charity, but change. That's really been a theme of the foundation from the beginning.

Q: So today, you'll stand on stage and look out over a sea of patrons from all over Colorado.

A: It's a huge testimony to the organization. Why would so many people be so energized if the organization wasn't doing splendid work. This is one of the things I feel best about in my life.

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