

## Gearing Up For The 'Conference With A Conscience'

### California First Lady Maria Shriver Shares Vision For Women's Gathering

Guided by a mission to empower and inspire women to become "architects of change," The Women's Conference is recognized as the largest and most dynamic gathering of women in the nation. More than 60 internationally acclaimed leaders will share words of encouragement and life lessons with 14,000 women at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, 300 E. Ocean Blvd., on October 22. Speakers include former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, current Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, investor and philanthropist Warren Buffett, CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour, seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, U2 lead singer and activist Bono and Caroline Kennedy, attorney, author and daughter of former President John F. Kennedy. Although tickets for the conference are sold out, The Women's Conference has added the "Night at The Village" on October 21 to provide more women with an opportunity to enjoy interactive experiences. Described as a "mall for and about women" by conference organizer and California first lady Maria Shriver, the inaugural Village will feature book signings with Shriver, Rachael Ray, Jamie Lee Curtis and Dr. Mehmet Oz. Tickets for the Village are \$20. For more information, visit [www.californiawomen.org](http://www.californiawomen.org).

During a trip in early October to visit domestic violence shelters in Long Beach, Shriver spoke with Business Journal Senior Writer Thyda Duong about the goals of the conference.

**LBBJ:** The conference has grown tremendously since you've been involved. Can you highlight some of the partnerships and initiatives that have been developed over the years?

**Shriver:** The goal of the conference when I took it over, I wanted it to become the premier forum for women in the nation. I wanted it to be a conference with a conscience. I wanted it to be more than just the day, [and] I wanted it to be something that went on 365 days a year, so we've really built up a community on the Web.

I wanted it to be something that was more than just a conference, meaning that I wanted it to have initiatives that it believed in, whether it's educating young women through scholarships, [or] whether it's through WE Invest, which is investing in a microlending program to lend women . . . money so they can start their own businesses – that was very important to being in Long Beach, which is one of the poorest cities in California.

We have a WE Connect program, which connects families under the poverty level to programs that exist for them, that help them get out of poverty – that was very important to me. We've started a store that funds these programs. We've started publishing – we fund books like a little book I came up with that gets tips from all the different conference speakers and puts them together to inspire people. We have an ongoing . . . community. You can watch the confer-



ence. We have a whole Web presence. We're partnering with community colleges and other organizations, so you can watch the conference around the country and we hope even around the world.

**LBBJ:** So are you satisfied with this growth that's occurred?

**Shriver:** Yeah, I think the Village is a great new component because we sold out so fast and there was such a demand for tickets. This is a way of getting an additional 10,000 people in the door. I think if it's successful, which I hope it will be, it'll support domestic violence shelters here in Long Beach. I hope to grow it into an entire day, where people can come and network and . . . go to book signings, go to lectures and have it have a little different feel from the day of conference, but really turn it into a two-day conference because we need more hotel rooms, we need more space, more women want to come than we can handle. I think that's all good, and I'm glad we've kept it here because there was a lot of demand to move it around. But I think it was a good decision to stay here, to be a part of this community, to support things in this community and build from this place.

**LBBJ:** Did you attend the conference before you became first lady?

**Shriver:** No, I didn't. I was invited several times, but I didn't.

**LBBJ:** When you were in broadcast journalism, what were the major women's issues, and how have you seen them evolve over the years?

**Shriver:** I think that when I started in television, there were hardly any women in television, so I think it's a very different medium today than it was when I started. I always did stories on a lot of the things that I'm focusing on as first lady, so whether it's helping women in domestic violence, whether it's reaching out to women in sex trafficking or whether it's empowering women, period. Those were things that I was interested in. . . . I try to program this conference like a journalist. I try to make it newsworthy, I try to bring newsmakers to it, I invite people that are in the news, that are at the top of their game and have a story to tell. So everybody who works on this conference approaches it like it's a television show, like it's a world event, like it's a political convention. And we try to program it to be bipartisan, and of the moment.

**LBBJ:** Do you miss being a broadcast journalist?

**Shriver:** I do this year. . . . Certainly politically, and now certainly economically, there's breaking news all over the place. But I think I've learned a lot in this job – I approach it like a job. The conference has been a godsend. The creation of the Minerva Awards is a way for me to kind of continue my journalism. I choose women that I'd love to do stories on, and we do stories on them and highlight them and promote them. So I think that I've continued my reporting, just in a different way.

**LBBJ:** What has your husband learned from you about women's issues?

**Shriver:** Oh, you'd have to ask him. He's the father of two teenage daughters, so I think he's learned a lot about women at all different ages. (Laughs.)

**LBBJ:** Do you feel like the governor has done enough to address women's issues?

**Shriver:** I think there's nobody in public life who feels he or she has done enough to, I think, promote issues of the poor, issues of diversity, issues of women, issues that confront men. I think that's the nature of being in a political role – even if you did enough that day, the next day there's always a whole new host of problems and a whole new host of things that you haven't done. . . . You want to look back and think, did you use your term wisely, did you make the differences that you [could]? I think he's interested in being a reformer. I think he definitely will have changed the state by the time he's finished, and it will have changed him.

**LBBJ:** And on a national level, do you feel like the current administration has done enough, and if not, what do you expect from the next president?

**Shriver:** I think everybody's focused on this election, and I think it's no secret where I've come out in this election. I'm hopeful that people will vote. I think that's the biggest service that anybody can do. You live in a democracy where you have the ability to vote, so you should exercise that right. But I think it's also important not to think that government is going to do everything for you. I'm a big believer in being the leader yourself. ■