

## Greenberg Traurig Lawyer Helps Women



Philanthropy in the United States has always taken many different forms. As early as 1831, French writer Alexis de Tocqueville reflected on what to him was a founding principle of American democracy – forming associations with others to ensure the well-being of all citizens.

In *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville wrote: “In the United States, as soon as several inhabitants have taken an opinion or an idea they wish to promote in society, they seek each other out and unite together once they have made contact. From that moment, they are no longer isolated, but have become a power seen from afar whose activities serve as an example and whose words are heeded.” Pamela Overton, a lawyer and shareholder with Greenberg Traurig’s Phoenix office, who chairs the Phoenix Litigation Practice, exemplifies today what de Tocqueville wrote about over two centuries ago. She recalls meeting with seven other community leaders to discuss how to help women from disadvantaged backgrounds in her city. The group was determined to use its expertise and business contacts to help other women. That meeting of eight women in 1992 led to the formation of the non-profit Fresh Start Women’s Foundation, which today supports a full-service women’s resource center, serving more than 2,500 women a month in Phoenix.



“We believe in educating women. To do this, we have a mentoring program, an extensive library, a clothing resale shop, workshops and seminars on everything from financial planning to family law,” said Ms. Overton. In 2012, she received the Founder’s Award from Fresh Start and this February she will be honored by the YWCA in Phoenix with its award for “Community Service by a Corporate Leader.” In many ways, her work with these organizations complements each other. Both serve to empower women in a city decimated by the housing crisis, where one out of five people receives food stamps.



Committed to a broad range of philanthropic endeavors, Ms. Overton also helps raise millions of dollars for other Phoenix-based charities such as the American Heart Association, Liberty Wildlife, and Trends Charitable Fund. She is also active in raising money for the Phoenix Theater, the oldest arts organization in Arizona as well as one of the oldest operating arts organizations in the country. She believes that theater plays an important role in a community. In appreciation, she received the Theater's "Women Who Care" award in 2011.

Businesses that give back to the communities where they do business, and employees who contribute their expertise to help non-profits, are an American philanthropic tradition. Non-profits in Europe depend largely on government subsidies.



“I am fortunate to work for Greenberg Traurig, a generous law firm with an established charitable giving program,” she observed. Ms. Overton oversees reviewing grant applications and is impressed with the work of charities in Phoenix.

“All the attorneys and shareholders in our offices contribute his or her time and financial support to helping the community. It is part of the firm’s culture,” she notes. In addition, Ms. Overton mentors the firm’s new associates and encourages them to also become active with non-profits.



“All non-profits need new talent so it is important that the firm’s associates get involved,” she said. As part of her mentoring program, she takes young lawyers to events and encourages them to become involved in causes about which they feel passionate. “Women’s issues resonated with me because the majority of the time, you are not only empowering and educating women, but also helping their children,” said Ms. Overton. “Everyone needs something to be passionate about and pursue it.”

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Written by Mary Frances Duffy

**Captions and Photo Credits:**

Photos Courtesy of Greenberg Traurig

1. 1) Pamela Overton, a lawyer and shareholder with Greenberg Traurig’s Phoenix Office who help found the Jewell McFarland Fresh Start Women’s Resource Center
2. 2) Courtyard of the Jewell McFarland Fresh Start Women’s Resource Center
3. 3) Two clients using the Employment and Education Computer Center to explore and apply for employment
4. 4) Lobby of the Jewell McFarland Fresh Start Women’s Resource Center
5. 5) Dress for Success area where clients are offered clothing to wear for interviews and for jobs