



ARIZONA WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT, INC.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**IN THE MIDDLE OF RISING UNEMPLOYMENT NUMBERS, "FACES OF SUCCESS" WILL BE HONORED FOR OVERCOMING GREAT ODDS**

***Three honorees to be celebrated at workforce development organization's 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Faces of Success Luncheon November 10***

PHOENIX, Ariz. (November 2, 2009) – When **Gisele Roenfeldt** first arrived at AWEE, she was unemployed, recently divorced, and a single parent of a 13-year old son. This attorney had suffered an unexpected job loss when the firm she was working for let everyone go. Completely blindsided, Gisele tapped every resource she could, but still ran down her reserves and faced eviction and discontinuation of her utility services.

When she found out about Arizona Women's Education & Employment (AWEE), she wasn't sure they could help but she was hungry for anything that might be ticket to another job. Besides help with the rent, Gisele found the tips she needed to help get noticed for a job. A few short months later, she found employment with Sandor Development as in-house legal counsel earning \$60-thousand a year. "AWEE did not just give me a one size fits all solution, the 56-year old professional said. "They went out of their way to help. I was kind of a different client, but there was help."

Gisele will be honored, along with **Louis Epperson** and **Irene Gonzales**, at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Faces of Success Luncheon beginning at 11:30 a.m. on November 10, 2009 at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa.

The luncheon, supported generously by Workforce Champion **Wells Fargo**, and many other business supporters, will be emceed by local media legend **Pat McMahon**, and owner and proprietor of Molina Fine Jewelers, **Alfred P. Molina**. The emcees, in appropriate luncheon form, will be entertaining the crowd with wacky and wild giveaways that have inspired the business guests to perform funny feats to win great prizes. The program also includes updates on the organization's efforts to support women, men and youth to find a good job, a steady paycheck and the dignity that comes along with their new direction in life.

That new direction has become the focus for Louis, a 20-year-old whose mother kicked him and most of his 13 siblings out of the house because of her personal challenges with drug use. Without a home, he faced the many temptations that confront teens. Cocaine use led him to a commit a crime and serve time in jail. But his months in the tents taught him a valuable lesson. Armed with a strong sense of responsibility, Louis found AWEE and started to turn things around. He got his GED, learned interviewing skills to talk effectively about his criminal history, and has since gained two jobs, including full-time employment with Sprouts Grocery Market.

But probably even more significant than that, Louis has had to grow up quickly when he took on the responsibility of becoming the guardian of two of his siblings – an eight-year-old sister and a 16-year-old

brother. From taking care of his own issues and needs, to helping them both get off to school every day, Louis has his hands full. He saved up enough money to find his own apartment where they all live and he stays focused on the important role-modeling he knows his younger brothers and sisters depend on. "AWEE helped open up the possibilities for my future and help me find myself," says the energetic Louis Epperson. "My hope for my brother and sister is to see them through high school and college and teach them to stand on their own two feet."

Irene Gonzales got lost in the nightmare of meth use starting at 19. She was married and had two young children. When her husband left her and took the two kids, she fell further into addiction. After several run-ins with the law, she was finally sent to prison for a four-year sentence on possession and manufacturing charges. While in prison she discovered she had the same passion for being an auto mechanic as her father. She pursued becoming a certified auto mechanic and two weeks out of prison had a job working on brakes, steering and suspension systems. Even with that job, she was told to seek out AWEE and did. "AWEE helped me succeed in that job," says Irene. The organization also helped her get her first set of tools, clothing to wear and other support.

Unfortunately Irene was let go from her auto mechanic job recently, but is filling in the time with administrative type work while aggressively pursuing a position back under the hood. She even volunteers to fix other AWEE participants cars as a way to give back and stay up on her skills. She attends weekly meetings at AWEE where she says "they hold me accountable to do the right thing" and mentors others in their transition from incarceration to life in the community. Irene is also spending time reconnecting with her now 16-year-old daughter who has moved back in with her after years apart. "She even thinks it's kinda cool to have a mom who can fix cars," Irene remarks. "Seeing her a bit proud of me after all we've been through is great."

For more information on AWEE or the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Faces of Success Luncheon, or to purchase tickets to the luncheon, please visit [AWEE.org](http://AWEE.org) or call (602) 223-4345.

### **About AWEE**

Arizona Women's Education & Employment has been successfully investing in women, families and this community through life and career success planning, training and support for more than 28 years. To date, AWEE has served and supported nearly 90,000 women, men and young adults in their quest to attain quality jobs that create positive changes and successful beginnings for themselves and their families. For more information, contact AWEE at (602) 223-4333 or visit [AWEE.org](http://AWEE.org).

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