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Women break glass ceiling at 'Unhappy Hour'

National Equal Pay Day marks differences in pay between the sexes

FORMORE information on Equal Pay Day, visit AFL-CIO.org, BPW.org, CFPA.org and NOW.org.



Bob Gay/

The Dominion Post

Jessica Schober, treasurer of the NOW chapter in Morgantown, places a sign in the window of Gibbie's Pub at the start of the "Unhappy Hour" observance Thursday afternoon.

BY JENNIFER McNALLY

The Dominion Post

Joyce Tapper looks around the room pleased with what she sees. Women of all ages have come out for the day's cause.

She's glad to see young people become involved in political decision-making.

"I've been associated with the labor movement for 40-some years and I've seen the lack in pay equity, the lack of opportunities for women," said Tapper, who's now 72.

"The glass ceiling does exist."

For most people, 5 p.m. signals the end of the working day and the beginning of "Happy Hour." But yesterday, it meant "Unhappy Hour" for Tapper and the other women at Gibbie's Restaurant on High Street.

"Unhappy Hour" is part of National Equal Pay Day, creating social awareness about the continued discrepancies in pay between the sexes.

April 15 marks the day women's wages catch up with men's -- meaning women work almost a year and a half to make what men earn in one year.

According to the AFL-CIO, women who work full time make 77 cents weekly for every dollar men earn.

That number decreases for women in minority groups. The AFL-CIO reports that African-American women earn 70 cents for every dollar men earn; Hispanic women earn 58 cents to the dollar.

Elizabeth Harless was one of the younger women at "Unhappy Hour."

At 25, she is the president of WVU's Female Equality Movement and vice president of the campus chapter of the National Organization for Women.

To Harless and others in her organizations, women's rights issues aren't about women specifically.

The groups advocate equal rights for all, no matter what race, creed, color or sexual preference.

"The situation is really horrible," Harless said. "Especially when you have the same education, background and you're getting paid less."

Charlene Marshall, a former delegate and Morgantown mayor, knows what that's like.

She remembers being hired as the first black woman to work at Morgantown's Sterling Faucet back in 1963.

At 32 years old, she was hired as a machine operator. She worked there for 15 1/2 years.

"Difference in pay is something I've experience personally," Marshall said. "And I've seen it happen to others.

"And, of course, I could see differences in more than one way."

Incumbent Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia County, was also out for "Unhappy Hour."

For many years, Fleischauer has worked within the Legislature, pushing for equal pay within state government positions.

"Equal pay for equal work is a matter of simple fairness," said Fleischauer, 50. "Discrimination hurts, especially in these tough economic times.

"With so many women working outside the home, nearly all families and especially single parent families suffer when a breadwinner is not paid the amount they should be based on their qualifications and job duties."

WVU student Tiffany Fleet discovered the gathering at "Unhappy Hour" through her women's studies

classes.

At 25, Fleet has been married and divorced. She's worked as an office manager since she was 18.

Already, she said, she's felt the sting of what it's like to receive less pay for doing the same job as another person. Her former employer would often ask her to do his job -- no extra money, no pat on the back.

"I found myself doing a lot of what I was not hired for," Fleet said. "And when I get a job again, I want paid for the work I do."

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