

- Most elected representatives from Monroe County, from Congress to town and village boards, are male, according to a *Democrat and Chronicle* analysis. City Council, where women hold six of the nine positions, is an exception. Rochester is the only one of the state's five large cities with a majority-female council, as documented in a new report by the Susan B. Anthony Center for Women's Leadership at [University of Rochester](#).
- Eighty percent of the 80 judges connected to Monroe County, from state Supreme Court down to town courts, are male. "The gender gap cannot be attributed to a lack of women who are qualified to serve on the bench, but is a result of the lack of opportunity and access afforded to women," concluded a recent report on federal and state-level judgeships by the State University of New York at Albany.
- The top jobs at the largest local employers and at the fastest growing private companies here are dominated by men. Among the 100 fastest-growing firms in the nine-county Rochester region in 2009, only nine were owned or led by women, the same as in 2008 — and a drop from the 13 women-led firms in 2007 and the 14 women-led firms in 2006.
- Only six of the 20 local school superintendents are female. By contrast, nearly half of the 153 school board members across Monroe County are female.
- Change happens slowly when the same people hold multiple leadership roles. Eighty of the 100 most highly connected nonprofit board members locally — each of whom serves on at least five boards — are men, according to a *Democrat and Chronicle* analysis a year ago of several years of tax records for the 1,100 largest nonprofit agencies in the Rochester region.

"Gender remains a factor that can impede women's progress to power and influence," said Nora Bredes, director of the Anthony Center. "Our institutions largely have been shaped by men's values, beliefs and traditions."

In the wake of recent scandals involving men in politics, several women suggested one solution would be to elect more women. Women tend to seek office not for personal ambition but to tackle problems deeply important to them, said Bredes, who teaches a course at UR on women in politics. She became a Suffolk County legislator in the 1990s to stop a nuclear power plant.

In business, the old boys' network has either adjusted to female executives, aged out or moved on, said Parker, 61, president and CEO of Rochester Business Alliance since 2005. She and other female leaders said it didn't take long to establish themselves as smart and skilled.

Hilda Rosario Escher, CEO of Ibero-American Action League in Rochester, said she has to be assertive at community meetings where there are more men in the room, or risk being drowned out.

Heidi Zimmer-Meyer, president of Rochester Downtown Development Corp., said that when she was the only local woman in the commercial real estate arena, she had to be faster and better at the work. Then gender, age, race or whatever your difference is melts away, she said. Women with more experience reached out to guide her, and she and others try to do the same today.

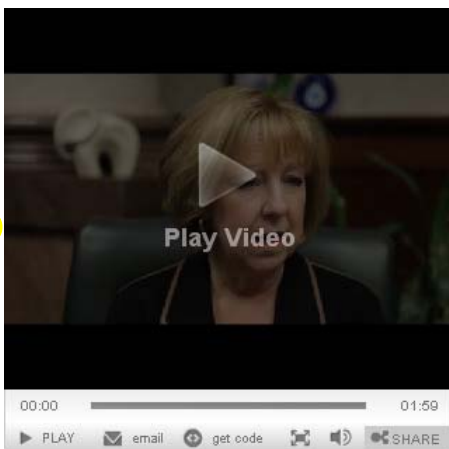
Rochester supportive

The nearly 500-member Rochester Women's Network is believed to be the largest organization of its kind in the nation. Ninety years after American women got the right to vote, the legacies of Anthony and others still inspire women here. Rochester can be a cautious community. But it also has a history of welcoming eccentrics, said Slaughter, including numerous inventors and founders of new religions, such as the Mormon and Spiritualist faiths. Slaughter, a Democrat from Fairport, is the first woman to chair the influential House Committee on Rules.

Rochester's diverse base of employers includes many educational institutions — which tend to be progressive — and many smaller companies that need talent, which helps women, said Parker. Because Rochester is less apt to attract outsiders, the community must look within and use talent here effectively, she said.

Brooks said 95 percent of local job growth is from small- and medium-sized businesses. While no full count of women-owned businesses exists, Monroe County has more than 300 that are certified to receive preferential treatment in getting government contracts, according to Empire State Development, a state agency. Billions of dollars are at stake. Gov. David Paterson issued a report Wednesday about successful

Maggie Brooks Monroe County Executive since 2003: "I find this to be a community that really does embrace and celebrate women as leaders."



efforts to direct more [bond](#) underwriting to women-owned and minority-owned firms, after years in which qualified firms got little of that business.

Rochester also has a reputation as a good place to raise a family, and a growing number of employers are becoming more family-friendly.

Leonard said that when she was a young professional elsewhere, it wasn't appropriate to talk about family at work. But these days, in Rochester, "You might find a CEO talking about going to their kids' soccer game. It's a very nice quality about Rochester."

But local female leaders cited many still-needed changes.

Tackling obstacles

Brooks, who in 2004 became the first woman to run Monroe County, pointed out that persistent inequities in pay and in household responsibilities hurt women's advancement.

Women on average earned 77 percent of men's pay in 2008, which was slightly worse than in 2007, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures for full-time, year-round workers. Most women are in the work force, yet women still carry the brunt of chores and the work of coordinating family life.

"Our society hasn't adapted to the reality that women are working," said Leonard. If it did, she said, early childhood education, year-round school and longer school days would be the norm. Seventy percent of school-aged children in Monroe County do not have a non-employed, at-home parent, she said, citing Center for Governmental Research analysis.

Women who are home raising children and volunteering in the community are important contributors to society, many female leaders said. "I recruited other mothers to be Girl Scout leaders, because I couldn't do it," said Leonard.

Brooks said being a stay-at-home mom is the hardest job. Women tend to be the moral compass of families and the chief consumers, so they wield power in multiple ways.

In this economy, families typically need two wage earners to achieve a middle-class lifestyle. In 2008, nearly four in 10 mothers were the primary breadwinner in their household, according to the Census Bureau.

So, said Brooks, efforts to expose young people to a wide range of options through career days and [internships](#) should grow, as well as help such as engineering scholarships to attract girls to male-dominated fields.

Kress, the first female president of MCC, said leadership programs, including Girl Scouts and Boys & Girls clubs, need to reach out to more girls, especially those who lack strong role models at home.

Warren, who grew up in Rochester, said girls need to hear the stories of successful women. She told about 40 Rochester girls in a Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection program how her relative's drug problem disrupted her family but didn't deter her goal to become a lawyer and elected official.

Developing pipeline

Women are going to college in droves, which puts more women in the pipeline toward leadership. Overall, nearly half of all students attending college in Monroe County are female. Every college except Rochester Institute of [Technology](#) is majority female. Enrollment is about equal by gender even at University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry. The UR Simon Graduate School of Business found it was losing young women to law schools because business schools traditionally required young adults to get four to six years' experience working in business before applying, said Dennis Kessler of Rochester, executive professor of entrepreneurship. Women might have children by then and find it hard to tackle graduate school. Female enrollment is inching up since Simon's Young Leaders Initiative began welcoming college graduates with zero to three years of experience.

Sandra Parker president and CEO of Rochester Business Alliance since 2005: "(The state of women in leadership locally is) moving in the right direction."



Anne Kress president of Monroe Community College since 2009: "It's important for young women to see this is possible for them."

Kessler started and hosts the Simon school's Women Entrepreneurs Blog — webatsimon.com — to help women network, and he celebrates the advancement of women. "Look at Congress. There's just too much testosterone," said Kessler, whose business operates 21 Burger King and 48 Friendly's restaurants, and member of several community boards. "We're far better off for having more women in leadership positions."

But getting to the top takes time. Dr. Nina Schor, 54, pediatrician-in-chief of Golisano Children's Hospital at Strong and chair of the department of pediatrics, was one of just 20 women among 130 pediatric department chairs at a recent national gathering. Women dominate pediatric residency programs, but it takes 12 to 20 years to be eligible to become a chairperson. "I think fueling the pipeline is the name of the game," she said.

Some companies such as Kodak and Xerox have groomed women for middle and upper management, said Leonard: "That's the story behind the pictures of women who are in the paper all the time."

Essie Calhoun started at Kodak as a salesperson in 1982 and is now chief diversity officer and director of community affairs, one of 11 women among 33 top executives there. She works to knock down obstacles to women advancing, such as lack of a sponsor/mentor, limited political knowledge, few role models and limited career opportunities. Those barriers were identified in a 2008 study by Catalyst, a national nonprofit group that tries to expand opportunities for women professionals.

Besides guiding formal efforts at work, Calhoun holds "mosaic sisterhood" networking gatherings at home for women from various backgrounds.

Among Fortune 500 companies, three CEOs were female in 2000. In 2009, there were 15.

"I think we have a long way to go," said Calhoun. "It's a journey."

Technology can help the home-work balance by untying professionals from their desks, Brooks said.

Likewise, companies that offer flexibility, including four-day work weeks, staggered shifts and job-sharing, attract a loyal, diverse work force. Kitty Van Bortel, 56, president of Van Bortel Ford and Van Bortel Subaru has an employee who starts later than others, after getting her kids on the bus. Workers given leeway still get the work done, sometimes at night or from home. "At the end of the day, it all evens out," said Van Bortel.

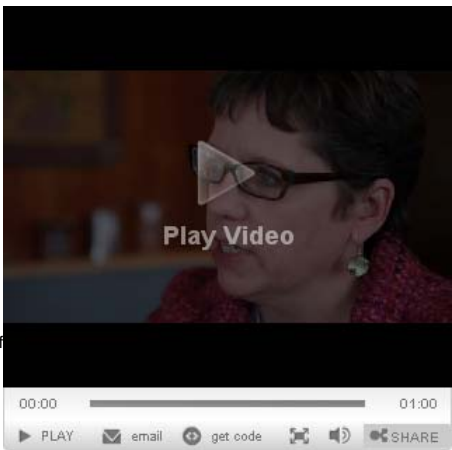
Van Bortel, who was the area's only car saleswoman 36 years ago, wants salespeople who understand women because most buyers and service customers today are female.

Making a difference

Women bring different ideas and approaches. They tend to tune in to the dynamics of their team, collaborate, see the big picture and use limited resources creatively, said Leanne Reed, a self-employed career coach and president of Rochester Women's Network.

Kress said having moms in charge can help restructure workplaces to accommodate parents. "I'm a different person as a working mother than as a working woman," said Kress, whose children are 6 and 8. "You start to ask questions" — such as whether to add more online classes, or whether policies end up attracting only older faculty members.

Lauren Dixon, 55, felt such pressure at her advertising sales job when she became a parent 26 years ago that she returned to work three days after giving birth.



Lovely Warren president, Rochester City Council, the youngest person to hold that position: "I have not experienced gender discrimination."



She made her company, Dixon Schwabl in Perinton, more parent-friendly. "If your child is in a kindergarten play at 11 o'clock, you better be there" — after making sure work is covered, said Dixon, chief executive officer and co-owner. The 85-employee company has grown every year and has been among the Best Small Companies in America for five consecutive years, ranking No. 1 in 2008.

Today's younger women — and men — bring different expectations of work-life balance to their careers. Melisza Campos, 30 and the daughter of Ibero's Rosario Escher, is a city school board member and the youngest master trainer for the Dale Carnegie business coaching company. But she says her first priority is being an excellent mom to her son, Rafael, who turns 1 next week.

She said her generation saw the baby boomers work themselves to exhaustion.

"We want to be moms," she said, singing to and playing with her son on the floor during an office interview for this story. They also want to use their professional skills. "It is hard."

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