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Group helps others help women, girls

■ Nancy Freudenthal, wife to Wyoming's sitting governor, lends voice to issue.

By Jennifer Marschak

When Nancy Freudenthal grew up in Cody, people in her community believed Wyoming was a great place to raise a family.

Today, as an adult who is a partner in the Cheyenne law firm Davis & Cannon and the wife of Gov. Dave Freudenthal, she still thinks Wyoming is good for families, but not for all of them.

"Wyoming is a great place for some families and really not so good for others," Freudenthal said at a breakfast gathering held Friday at Teton Pines by the Wyoming Women's Foundation.

To an audience of about 50 area residents, mostly women, Freudenthal rattled off a long list of grim statistics to explain the "overwhelming" number of issues that prompted her to embrace the foundation as one of her causes.

For example, she said Wyoming's divorce rate is 50 percent higher than the rate for the rest of the country; one out of every four Wyoming families is headed by a single parent, generally the mother; and about one third of single-parent families in Wyoming live below the federal poverty line.

Behind-the-scenes help

Wyoming ranks first in the nation in youth chewing tobacco, second for kids sniffing glue or other inhalants, and third for kids smoking cigarettes, she said.

"These are not the statistics that we want to be our flagship statistics," Freudenthal said.

The Wyoming Women's Foundation was established by The Chambers Family Fund, a Denver-

based private foundation, as an endowment fund within the Wyoming Community Foundation.

The women's foundation aims to expand the role of women in philanthropy and make grants to organizations that serve women and girls so that all women in Wyoming can achieve economic self-sufficiency.

The foundation is only three years old, and already its reach has extended to Jackson Hole.

Grants given out by the foundation in 2002 included \$3,000 to the Jackson-based Community Children's Project to help maintain its short-term emergency service fund for women in crisis situations.

The foundation also gave \$2,500 to Girls Actively Participating, an organization based in Moose that helps female adolescents develop independence and self-reliance through outdoor activities.

Freudenthal described the foundation as a "big wheel" that can help improve the economic lot of women in Wyoming by getting the little wheels turning, a concept reinforced by Jackie Freeze, a member of the Wyoming Women's Foundation advisory board from Rock Springs who also spoke to the group.

"We're a group of people who believe in long-lasting change for women and girls in the state of Wyoming," Freeze said.

The foundation is a "behind-the-scenes helper," she said.

"We're not the doers; we help fund the doers."

A drive to raise funds

Merle Chambers, president of The Chambers Family Fund, said historically only a small percentage of philanthropic giving goes toward programs that specifically address the needs of girls and women.

The Wyoming Women's Foundation and organizations like it that are part of the Women's Funding Network were established in part with the idea





that perhaps more money could be steered toward organizations benefiting women and girls if women were in charge of the grant-giving, she said.

Freeze told the group, "Women have left it to men to make decisions about giving.

"We really are committed to philanthropy for women in the state of Wyoming."

The foundation is trying to raise \$500,000 to match a \$500,000 challenge grant from The Chambers Family Fund. A challenge grant, the fund president said, will ensure the foundation's efforts are "of Wyoming."

Freeze said a \$1 million endow-

ment for the foundation will allow it to issue grants on a regular basis and achieve long-term change for women in Wyoming.

"We already think we've made a difference," she said.

The foundation is at the halfway point toward reaching its \$500,000 match to the challenge grant, Freeze told the gathering.

"Our goal, kind of a lofty goal, is to reach the rest of that goal this year," she said.

The Wyoming Women's Foundation is based in Laramie. For information, call (307) 721-8300 or visit the Web site www.wycf.org.

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