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'Soldier Girls' author talks about brave women at Women's Foundation event

A chance at a better life often leads both women and men down unexpected paths. As The Women's Foundation of Colorado has studied, a better life comes from helping women and girls reach their full potential through educational opportunity, economic security and poverty reduction, employment and earnings, personal safety and women's leadership.

"Empowering women and girls to achieve economic independence is at the forefront of all we do," said Louise Atkinson, president and CEO of The Women's Foundation of Colorado. "We're working hard to help women and girls identify and gain opportunities and resources for educational, career and economic advancement. We're also teaching women how to support each other better — becoming stronger leaders and philanthropists in their own right."

Some women have enlisted in the military as a means to reach their full potential. In the late 1980s, the military ran a series of ads enticing young men and women to enlist in the National Guard — for one weekend a month and two weeks a year, the enlistee would be provided an education and money while supporting the U.S. military. By the mid-2000s following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, the National Guard had fewer

recruits than needed to staff the two wars in the Middle East, and those who signed up for 50 days of service annually were stunned to be called up to active duty.

'SOLDIER GIRLS'

In Colorado author Helen Thorpe's latest book "Soldier Girls," we learn about three women's lives as they sign up for the National Guard — one to serve her country in her father's footsteps, one to enable her to attend

college that would be well out of reach any other way, and the other to provide for her family. The National Guard seemed a way out of poverty, a chance for a better life. You can hear directly from Thorpe on Aug. 8, when she will be the keynote speaker at the Women's Foundation of Colorado annual luncheon.

While not expecting to be deployed, the women and men in the Guard honored their commitment. Within days of learning of their deployment, childcare for the year was arranged, checks were pre-dated for rent, dogs were found care and the troops readied themselves for war. A grandmother serves beside 20-year-old men and women.

The military provides an income, a set of rules to follow and seemingly a safety net, yet it is not a career choice

IF YOU GO ...

What: Annual Women's Foundation of Colorado Vail Valley luncheon and silent auction with keynote speaker Helen Thorpe.

When: Friday, Aug. 8, at 10:30 a.m. (silent auction), with lunch beginning at noon.

Where: Vail Marriott Mountain Resort in Vail.

Tickets: Visit WFCO.org/vailluncheon or contact Sarah Braun at 303-285-2976 or SarahB@wfc.org.

that is right for all women. According to the Pentagon, 203,000 women comprised about 14.5 percent of the active-duty force in 2011. Throughout the wars, women still were not permitted to be on the "front lines."

However, the women followed in "Soldier Girls" faced combat of different types. While the women worked alongside their male counterparts, they also had to be wary of sexual assault, strong enough to fight to receive the training they would need while at war and able to handle situations for which they had not been fully trained. "Soldier Girls" provides stunning insight into the lives of these three soldiers and causes thought-provoking discussion including the definition of combat, what has been accomplished

WOMEN'S FOUNDATION, A15

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WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

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in Iraq and Afghanistan, the close bonds formed during a deployment, the feelings of anxiety upon return and the unexpected feeling of letting someone down if one is not selected to be deployed.

“Understanding the issues and helping women from all walks of life define their goals and discover ways to achieve them is what The Women’s Foundation is about. We are leading the way for girls and women across the state to learn what opportunities and changes we can help create so they may attain economic independence.”

Louise Atkinson
President and CEO, The Women’s Foundation of Colorado

The struggles of these women are in some ways not much different than those experienced by many women. During the past two years, The Women’s Foundation of Colorado provided forums in 11

communities across the state to discuss and define issues for women and just what it means to reach one’s full potential. Through this discussion and the findings of its 2013 Research Report on The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado, The Women’s Foundation identified many similarities of need, along with much diversity in the levels of women’s income, poverty status, use of public work support programs and childcare options — all factors which play a role in deciding a woman’s life path.

“Understanding the issues and helping women from all walks of life define their goals and discover ways to achieve them is what The Women’s Foundation is about,” Atkinson said. “We are leading the way for girls and women across the state to learn what opportunities and changes we can help create so they may attain economic independence.”

The Women’s Foundation of Colorado is dedicated to working alongside communities across Colorado, including Eagle County, to build resources and partnerships to ensure every woman and girl in Colorado reaches her full potential. By working together, we can achieve more.

Heather Hower has lived in the Vail Valley for 15 years and has worked with several area nonprofits. A mother of two young girls, she is passionate about empowering girls and women, as well as obtaining a variety of educational opportunities for her daughters, whether exploring the outdoors or participating in the summer reading program.

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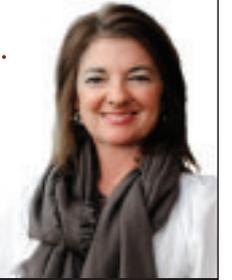
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