

Encouraging the next generation of women



Reaves speaks to professionals, MC female athletes during chamber event

Photo by Samantha Smith University of Tennessee Assistant Coach and Recruiting Coordinator Sharrona Reaves speaks about how to achieve goals and face obstacles during the seventh annual Inspiring Women Luncheon and Program in the Orleans Ballroom at Blue Chip Casino on Wednesday afternoon.

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Ms. Reaves with Marquette Catholic High School girls basketball team members



Mary Jo Orlowski,
Chamber President

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By SAMANTHA SMITH - Staff Writer

Members of the business community and local leaders gathered in the Orleans Ballroom at Blue Chip Casino for the seventh annual Inspiring Women Luncheon, hosted by the Michigan City Area Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber of Commerce also invited female athletes from Michigan City Area Schools to listen to keynote speaker Sharrona Reaves, who is the assistant coach and recruiting coordinator for the University of Tennessee women's basketball team.

"These students represent our future and the community," said Chamber of Commerce President Mary Jo Orlowski. "They've been chosen because of their involvement in athletics and their leadership capabilities."

Representing PNC Bank, the event's largest sponsor, was its Northwest Indiana Regional President Corinna Ladd, who spoke about why PNC Bank believes it is important to have women in the workplace.

"As business professionals, we have an opportunity and responsibility to encourage the next generation of professional women," she said. "This is a room full of executive entrepreneurs and we're always excited to celebrate successful women."

Once Reaves took the podium, she made it clear she would be speaking about the importance of discipline and determination when trying to accomplish goals.

"This is going to be a tough talk. Reaching your goals a process and it's hard," she said. She also spoke about how a coach can have an impact on a young person's life.

"We (coaches) have the ability to build people up, we have the ability to tear people down, we have the ability to make them feel like they can do anything in the world and we have the ability to make them feel like they can't do anything," Reaves said.

"I think we also have the responsibility to lead, to be teachers, to be councilors and your kids can become our kids in certain situations, but we also have to be tough and fair," she added.

To further prove her point, the University of Alabama graduate told the audience a personal story about how she landed her first top assistant coaching job right out of college, something that, according to Reaves, is unheard of in that industry. But while she did have success at first, the job did not end well.

"At 27 years old I found myself in Chicago, ... pregnant and the coach let me go because I refused to get an abortion," she said.

As a result, Reaves came up with seven successful mindsets to discipline herself to achieve her goals and work her way back up despite her circumstances at the time.

She said those mindsets were:

- Know who you are.
- Listen to your inner voice.
- Discipline what you think about.
- Expect change.
- Expect support and hate from others.
- Be a good person.
- Don't quit.

"If you keep talking positive to yourself and you surround yourself with good people and you stay a good person and you know who you are and if you believe in yourself and embrace change as it comes to you, not only will you stay on your road, but you're going to get to your destination which is your successful thing in life, whatever that is for you," Reaves said.

She said because she followed this mentality, she was able to achieve what she has today and she is determined to pass her knowledge down to young people, especially young women.

"This is my passion, this is what I love to do, what I was created to do," Reaves said, "to mentor young girls and help them become great women."