



ZHS scholarship winners Megan Rodenbeck, left, and Abby Lynn Smith with Roberta McKowen of PWZ.

Professional Women of Zachary raises money to fund educational pursuits

By Howard Arceneaux

The Professional Women of Zachary is an organization that's all about attitude. It's a can-do attitude, one that is reflected by the group's president, Moonyean Wood.

For example, this time last year, the PWZ had just formed and established an ambitious fund-raising goal for their first year of \$50,000.

Nothing was going to stand in their way. And nothing did.

"We were just short: we raised \$48,556.79," said Wood.

Wood had the same can-do attitude toward her work. After beginning her career as an educator, she became a general building contractor in an overwhelmingly male-dominated world.

"In 1977, a woman as a contractor was almost unheard of," she said. She enjoyed a successful career as a contractor, eventually earning numerous accolades along the way. She also earned the respect of her peers.

After she retired in September 2005, she decided to start an organization that had as its main goal to benefit women in Zachary.



PWZ's big fall fund-raiser will again be a sporting clay shooting event on Oct. 28.

"I wanted to give back to women in a way that would encourage them to pursue their dreams," said Wood, who credits her aunt with helping her realize her dreams. "I really believe in this. I believe that there is such a need to help women who have not, for whatever reason, been able to achieve a goal or a dream. Most of

the time the stumbling block is the fact they can't financially afford to do it. We're trying to ease those financial burdens.

"We also want to mentor women and stay in touch with them and ensure they are successful. When they become successful, they will give back and help other people."

Hence the PWZ was born as a non-profit organization comprised of business and professional women who live and/or work in the Zachary community. The group includes more than 40 women from many different professions and backgrounds.

"We were \$1,800 short of the goal; that's not bad for our first

year," said Wood. "We set the same goal for this year, and I'm confident we can get there."

Beginning last summer, the PWZ raised the money several ways: membership dues, a sporting clay shooting event last November, a fun run in the early spring and an auction in May.

"We have about 15 workhorses that do the majority of the work, but everyone helps how they can," said Wood. "Our members are dynamic, successful women that work hard."

What they did with the money was equally impressive: They gave most of it away.

Two graduating seniors from Zachary High School received PWZ scholarships last May: Megan Rodenbeck and Abby Lynn Smith were awarded scholarships totaling \$18,000 from PWZ. Rodenbeck is now at LSU studying biology with hopes of a career in a health-related field. Smith is pursuing a degree in technical theater at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches.



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Those scholarships are the largest ever awarded in the history of Zachary High School.

In August, PWZ awarded three more scholarships for women to pursue their studies: Jennifer Beene, a married mother of two, is working on prerequisite requirements toward a nursing degree at Southern University. Angela Howland, who works full time for EMS, also goes to school full time, studying to become a physician's assistant. Linda Snowden already has her LPN license but is studying to become an RN, with help from her PWZ scholarship.

"This was just like 'wow' for me," said Beene, who had been out of school for nine years to raise her sons, Dylan and Devon. "Somebody gave me something to help me that I don't have to return. It's given me an opportunity of a lifetime to pursue my education."

Added Howland, "It's a huge blessing. It's great that they can plant the seed for me and to help me out without expecting anything in return."



From left to right, Moonyean Wood, Jennifer Beene, Angela Howland and Roberta McKowen. Also pictured is Linda Snowden.

Both women say because of PWZ's example, they plan to give back to the Zachary community when their educations are completed. Same with Snowden, who hopes to open a rural home health-care business when she finishes

her studies.

Beside the \$33,000 in scholarships, PWZ also gave \$2,500 to Copper Mill Elementary's library in the spring.

It's all about giving back.

Still, there are big challenges to overcome. The biggest, said Wood, "Is to get the community more involved. If the community would get involved, I think that they'd be part of this whole giving back. It takes a lot to do it; we need the community to become aware that we have this goal and they can be part of it. We want them to be part of this."

Another challenge is to get people to commit time from their busy schedules to participate in PWZ's activities.

This year, PWZ again has some ambitious fund-raising activities. The second-annual PWZ Sporting Clay Event is scheduled for Oct. 28 at Hunter's Run in Port Allen. The event begins with registration at 1 p.m. and shooting starts at 2 p.m. Competitors will shoot for prizes, and there will be an auction onsite. There will also be plenty of good food available. The cost is \$600 per team or \$150 per individual. The minimum age is 16, and shooters should bring their own guns.

"The goal is 28 teams," said Wood. "All donations are tax

deductible."

In the early spring, the 5K Fun Run will again take place.

Amanda Beard with Amanda Beard Real Estate is the chairperson.

The third fund-raiser is a "Louisiana Sportsman's Paradise Dream Package" raffle drawing. The grand prize package includes a four-wheeler, a shotgun, a guided duck hunt and much more. Only 300 tickets will be sold at \$100 apiece. Also being discussed is a New Year's Eve dance.

All of the net revenues generated will go toward helping fund the educational pursuits of women from Zachary.

"PWZ is a vehicle for women to pool their energy and their resources and, as a group, lend a helping hand," said Wood. "I don't think anyone in this organization has an attitude of 'look at what I did.' It's a group of people who want to help people and who don't care about personal accolades. We challenge people in Zachary to be generous and help us reach our goals."

Roberta McKowen is the group's membership chairperson. She can be reached at 278-6575 for information. For information about the fund-raising activities, contact Wood at 658-0000.



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