2014 Alumni Association Annual Holiday Luncheon and Boutique

**Guest Speaker: Mary Alice Williams**

My favorite thing. A room full of Jersey Girls. We “Jersey Girls” have been defined nationally by stories of the *Real Housewives of New Jersey*. And Carmella Soprano. And Snookie. And those stories resonate. Right? We love drama. Trash talk. Big hair. Orange make-up.

Let me tell you another story. About the real Jersey girls. In 1789 ... in the very first Presidential election ... Jersey girls had the vote. It was probably an oversight. Nothing in state law said they could. But nothing said they couldn’t. So they did. But in that very first presidential election, there was voter fraud in ... wait for it ... Essex County. They blamed the women and disenfranchised them along with the rest of their sisters until the 19th amendment was past in 1920.

Last Tuesday, we sent our first woman to congress in a dozen years. She’s also the first African American woman in New Jersey history to represent us in Congress. And there’s nothing like a Jersey Girl to bust up the gridlock in congress.

Women get stuff done. Just over a year ago, in October 2013, with the government shut down and the male partisans at the top dug in, six women saved the country. Three republican senators and three democrats sat down and solved the problem. And even Senator John McCain gave them full credit.

We don't just solve problems. We build things. Families and communities and companies.
Today, for the first time in American history, there are more women in the American workforce than men, and 40% of mothers are the sole or primary breadwinner in their household.

Until 1988, a woman couldn’t start her own business without getting her husband’s signature. Until 1988, if a woman wanted to start a business in America, she could be required to get the signature of a spouse or a male relative to take out a loan. Then Congress passed the civil rights milestone “Women's Business Ownership Act.” It gave women entrepreneurs access to capital on the strength of their own merits. It was called House resolution 50/50. We’re not close to 50/50. When it comes to earning equal pay for equal work, the World Economic Forum ranks the United States 65th out of 142 countries, behind Zimbabwe.

The Small Business Administration in Washington has a woman at the helm. In fact, the last four leaders have been women. BUT, of the $83 billion dollars in federal contracts doled out to small businesses, women have been woefully under-represented. So the SBA’s launched a new federal contract program to help women-owned small business break into the market armed with the three “C”s: Counseling, Contracting and Capital. So the SBA is guaranteeing capital from mega to micro loans. They’ve set up a network of 100 women business centers where women can access mentoring and training.

And we are changing the face of entrepreneurship in America. Our businesses are the fastest-growing sector of our economy.

Here are the numbers compiled by The National Association of Women Business Owners and The National Women's Business Conference:

- Nine million businesses are owned by women.
- Women have created more than 23 million jobs and generated almost 1.5 billion dollars in sales.
- The economic impact of women-led and women-owned businesses is more than $3 trillion.
- Women-owned firms are growing at twice the rate of male owned companies and one-and-a-half times the rate for all businesses.
And at a time when the old established companies are downsizing, the action is in companies less than five years old. They're hiring. The real action is among the congenitally-connected young women. They're called the 22s. They are 22 years old. Willing to work 22 hours a day. For $22,000 a year.

Jersey Girls? Amex Open’s 2014 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report shows there are 230,000 women-owned businesses in New Jersey, employing 260,000 people. That's an increase of 48 percent since 1997.

That's a story that defines Jersey Girls. Powerful. Smart. Educated. Exhausted over-achievers. And that story resonates more strongly than Snookie. Right?

I tell stories for a living. Journalism fulfills a fundamental human need of people to hear their own stories.

I got back into the business of telling our stories because of a great opportunity to create something new. A news program that would connect us New Jersey people to each other. At the Continental Congress, Ben Franklin predicted that New Jersey would be a “mere apostrophe” between New York and Philadelphia. And from a media perspective, it has been. South Jersey folks think they’re Philadelphians. Up here, we’re New Yorkers, right? Meantime, no one was covering the real us.

The Communications Act of 1934 gave every state a public broadcasting outlet. We had one. But given funding constraints, it had been a conduit for legislative hearings aired without editing or context. Like Public Access Channels. Or C-SPAN. Without zeroing in on the people the legislation would affect. Now for the first time, by the grace of Neal Shapiro, president of WNET, we’re being given the opportunity to create something that is unique to New Jersey. Television news that has our voice. We know that people are turned off by the way they're treated by television news. We aim to treat the audience as though they are educated. We are using a broader vocabulary. Literary references and historical references, because we know people can connect with that.

Fires and murders don’t help people decide. In the end, journalism is about helping people decide. What to wear. How to vote. How to prepare. How to help. What to support. Where to share.
We don't cover incidents. We cover stories to help people understand the issues that frame the incidents. So we didn't cover the killing of rookie cop Melvin Santiago in Jersey City this past summer as a stand-alone story. We covered the fault lines in the city itself that caused so much distrust between communities. When a police officer shot an un-armed black man in Ferguson, Missouri, and military-grade weaponry emerged, trained against protesters, we knew what we were looking at. We'd broken the MRAP story. We'd already reported the Pentagon program to unload Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles on local police forces. We'd already reported that the Bergen County Sheriff's Department had them.

Television news tanked in credibility and ratings over the last 30 years. When I got into this business as a teenager, nurses were always ranked at the top of most trusted lists. But Journalists were right up there at number two. During Watergate and during the Vietnam War, that was certainly true. Now we're an inch-and-a-half above Congress. How did that happen? It happened because television news became ideological.

Newspapers have always had an ideological bent. The New York Times was always liberal. The Wall Street Journal was always conservative. That was never true in TV. In fact, as part of the Communications Act, it wasn't allowed. When cable came in, that was no longer a stricture. We at CNN decided we were not going to be ideological because it was imperative that we establish our creditability. The fact that others have now decided they will tout a party line, even if what they're saying flies in the face of facts, has created the echo chamber. Now, too many people are listening to whoever on television is affirming what they already suspect to be true. And refusing to listen to another viewpoint. And that change has been unhelpful.

The other big change is that speculation for so many hours and in so many areas has taken the place of facts. It could be that the Supreme Court is going to ... and what if the ... where is the outcry ... it's not journalism. It’s not facts. It’s speculation. And it’s causing reporters to stand between the camera and the story.

Free debate is important. We need to have a collision of too many ideas and too many points of view in order to make responsible decisions for our families and communities and country. But it has become such a noisy
arena. And I think lowering the noise level and elevating the fact level is going to be crucial to our being able to be trusted.

At too many schools ... NOT St. Elizabeth's ... college kids are being taught that anyone with a camera is a journalist. I believe that any hack with a smartphone and an ax to grind can call themselves a journalist, but that doesn't make it so. It takes a cadre of well-trained, ethical, agile people to be journalists. And I think it's our job to make a distinction between the two and help the audience decide what information is trustworthy.

When we designed and launched CNN – the world's first global 24-hour television news network – we didn't know what we were doing or what we would become, but we knew it was critical that we get everyone in the world sharing information and stories at the same time. Because I believed then, and still do, that it's the basis of world peace.

I really believe when the whole world is watching, the whole world is safer. Yesterday was the anniversary of the Achille Lauro hijacking. When terrorists commandeered a cruise ship and murdered my neighbor, Leon Klinghoffer. It happened on a ship with no cameras present. Until only recently, it was true that bad guys couldn't get away with evil when the whole world was watching.

There was one woman whose story taught me more than any told by the mighty and powerful. Her name was Mary Noon. She'd lost everything in the Johnstown flood of 1979. As I interviewed her in the receding mud and debris, I watched her go through the five stages of grief – anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and finally, as she folded a ruined baby blanket, acceptance. She would prevail.

There is magnificence in the human spirit that never gets tested for most of us. But every so often, in the crucible, you see it. We have that in all of us. It has been my privilege as a journalist to be able to witness that so many times.

At NJTV, we vow to commit great journalism, elevate the conversation, and give it just enough attitude to make it uniquely Jersey. Women have always shared stories in order to solve problems. Women take models that work in one arena and transport them to help in another arena. That's what we do.
That's what gatherings like this are for. And if you are a smart, powerful overachiever who happens to also be an orange-faced, big-haired, trash-talking drama queen … welcome to our club.

Thank you.