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Hattie Dorsey Harlow

— a people's champion

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Peninsula profile

STANFORD — Hattie Dorsey Harlow "moves in all worlds," in the words of her executive assistant at the Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition.

Harlow, 42, directs a staff of 18 and manages a budget of more than \$800,000. In 10 years with the coalition, Harlow has moved from administrative assistant to director of resource development and then to assistant director. She was appointed executive director in 1979.

The coalition itself was founded in 1968 as a non-profit, charitable corporation to tackle local problems such as youth unemployment and housing discrimination.

As director of the coalition, Harlow has climbed to the peaks of the Peninsula's wealthiest corporations to solicit funds for the poor and disadvantaged.

She has braved the bureaucratic swamps of the federal government to seek better health care for pregnant teen-agers in East Palo Alto.

She has bridged the islands of industry and school system with a cooperative program to train high school students for space-age technology.

She has helped direct the coalition from a time of social activism and protest to a time in which problems are solved by partnerships of social agencies, governments and private industries.

Now, after 10 years with the

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Times Tribune file photo

Hattie Dorsey Harlow is taking her battle to New York City.

PROFILE

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Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition, Harlow will move on to an even bigger world. She has accepted a new position to develop jobs and training for the disadvantaged for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in New York City. The foundation's goal is to "serve the underserved" of society, using the assets of the Avon Corp., Harlow said at the coalition office on the Stanford campus Wednesday.

"The new job will give me the opportunity to put in place on a nationwide basis some of the programs I have tried to do here," Harlow said.

A native of Atlanta, Ga., Harlow held a variety of jobs in administration and community development before she joined the urban coalition in 1972.

She attended Clark College in Atlanta and worked in the Washington, D.C. office of Congressman Charles Weltner of Atlanta. Later, she was the executive secretary for the mayor of that city.

In her 10 years with the Stanford coalition, Harlow said she has seen the processes of social change evolve significantly. In the '60s and '70s, social change was accomplished by noisy social protests, which brought a response fueled by white middle-class guilt, Harlow admitted.

"But it's no longer enough to holler and scream," Harlow said. "If you have no plan to carry out after the protest you have not won the battle."

Under Harlow's leadership the coalition has become more of an advocate and less a protest group. The coalition has supported incorporation for East Palo Alto and advocated a Dumbarton Bridge connection through that city that would promote industrial development.

Harlow's cool, polished, articulate manner and her effectiveness as a manager are most certainly reasons why the Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition has survived, and two-thirds of the more than 100 other urban coalitions ceased to exist after the decline of social protesting in the '70s.

Brenda Trueblood, Harlow's executive assistant at the coalition, praised Harlow's ability to move in corporate circles as the times have changed.

"She has amazing public relations skills and fund-raising ability," Trueblood said Thursday.

When people talk about Harlow, they also mention her level of energy.

"She's a superb project person," said John Young, president of Hewlett-Packard. "She has enthusiasm and stick-to-itiveness. She dives in and makes sure all of us get to work."

What many people may not realize about Harlow is that her high-level energies are fueled in part by indignation and anger.

"My anger and frustrations about things are what drive me to design programs to help people," Harlow said. "That inner turmoil gets me out there

and that inner anger motivates me into caring."

Harlow said that current approach of President Reagan's government is building plenty of inner turmoil, both in herself and in others.

"The Urban Coalition came into being out of anger and frustration and people are feeling these things again," Harlow said.

Nor have the lessons of the vigorous social protests of a decade ago been forgotten, Harlow warned.

"Black Americans will not wait for another Martin Luther King Jr. We as a people have to build on our strengths and realize what they are. I'm as frustrated now as any minority leader in this country," Harlow said.

Harlow predicts that there will be concerted pressure on the federal government to restore social welfare programs. The pressure will come from blue-collar workers, women and the poor of all races, she said.

"If frustration and despair build among those in the streets, the reaction will be bloody," Harlow predicted grimly.

Looking back on her achievements gives Harlow cause to be much more positive about how people can work together to solve problems.

She is very proud of the "Peninsula Academies Program" that uses the resources of the Sequoia Union High School District and high-technology industries to train students for meaningful jobs.

At Menlo-Atherton and Sequoia high schools, 72 students began last year to study electronics and computer technologies with traditional subjects such as math and English built around the career-oriented classes. The collaborative effort, managed by the coalition, is 100 percent financed by the private industries, Harlow said.

The private companies taking part are Hewlett-Packard, Lockheed Missiles & Space Co., Signetics, United Airlines and Measorex.

A new job in New York is not the only big change in Harlow's life. Just over a year ago, she adopted a baby girl, making her a single parent.

"Victoria Michelle has brought a lot of stability in my life," Harlow said with pride.

"I don't fear being single because I've been single for most of my life," Harlow said. "But if I meet the right person, I do wonder, however, how that somebody else might fit into my independent life style."

When pressed to count her blessings, Harlow admits that she can be counted "among the black women who are 'making it.'"

"I laugh when I tell my friends I'm ready to take New York by storm," Harlow said with a grin.

Hewlett-Packard's John Young thinks that Harlow will do just fine back East.

"She has that kind of pursuit to get things done that is relentless, pure and simple," Young said.