

# Women's Festival a Success

By **Jeanette Casillas** / CASA

**T**HE FOURTH ANNUAL WOMEN'S FESTIVAL celebrated the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day last weekend with another successful interactive, multi-cultural forum focusing on the key areas of women's lives: personal, professional, philanthropic, political, and planet.

The two day festival included a professional business expo, an awards program, and educational and enlightening discussions led by renowned speakers and authors from around the world. With more than 900 pre-registered attendees, the festival drew in over 1,000 people.

Two of the highlights of this year's event included a group of Iraqi women police officers and the presentation of the first annual Gutsy Gals Inspire Me Award.

The delegation of four female members of the Iraqi Police started their U.S. tour in Santa Barbara. At the Festival, they took part in a panel discussion, *Building Lasting Relationships: On the Front Lines of Empowerment in the Middle East*.

"This is the women's first trip to America," shared Colonel Lillian Anita Dixon, who is accompanying the women from Iraq along with Colonel Janice M. Gravely. "They are a joy to have and this is a great opportunity for us."

The four women are from the first class of female officers to graduate in 2009. The purpose of the visit to the United States is to allow the women of the Iraqi police to gain a better appreciation for how the U.S. integrates and employs females in the military and police. During their visit the women attended the Westmont President's



**Deborah Hutchison**, Gutsy Gals co-founder; **Mary Schnack**, Gutsy Gals Inspire Me Award Recipient and Women's Festival co-founder; and **Phyllis de Picciotto**, Gutsy Gals co-founder

Breakfast with former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and received a tour of the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department.

"We are really proud and happy to be here," shared the women. "We feel confident and encourage other women in our country to join."

The women's superior officers are all male and were supportive of them participating in the U.S. Tour. They were asked to share their experience upon their return to Baghdad. "At the beginning it was hard and challenging. Some men accept it, but some still do not," the women noted.

Another highlight was the presentation of the first Gutsy Gals Inspire Me Award to Mary Schnack, co-founder of the Women's Festival. Schnack, a successful entrepreneur, has been a communications specialist for almost 30 years. She is an award-winning writer, reporter, public relations specialist, and advocate.



U.S. Army Officers Lieutenant Colonel **Janice M. Gravely** and Colonel **Lillian Anita Dixon** with Iraqi Military Police Officers Lieutenant **Israa Abdulkareem Ismael**; Lieutenant **Media Raad Jassim**; Lieutenant **Noor Kareem Muhsen**; and Lieutenant **Israa Kamil Fakhir**