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Join in Kicking Off National Women's History Month

Each year, MailMax and Cornerstone Alliance collaborate to kick off National Women's History Month. We dedicate special focus to the remarkable achievements of resilient and determined women right here in Southwest Michigan.

Since 1987, the United States has officially designated March as National Women's History Month. Each woman possesses a unique story and valuable contributions to offer the world. So, prepare yourself, as the coming month

is dedicated to honoring extraordinary women, and we are fully prepared to celebrate it. Let's mark this women's month by empowering women to pursue their dreams and meet their educational goals.

Women's History Month recognizes the often overlooked contributions of women throughout history, society, and culture. Since 1987, it has been celebrated annually in the United States, as well as in other countries like the United Kingdom and Australia, each March. March was chosen to align with International Women's Day on March 8.

The genesis of this month-long celebration can be traced back to Women's History Day in 1978, initiated by the Sonoma, California school district. The event included essay competitions, presentations, and a parade in Santa Rosa, engaging hundreds of students. The concept gained momentum, leading to widespread celebrations across school districts, communities, and organizations nationwide. In 1980, the National Women's History

Alliance advocated for the holiday to be recognized as a national week, a proposal endorsed by President Jimmy Carter, who issued the first proclamation declaring the week of March 8 as National Women's History Week. The subsequent year, Congress passed a resolution establishing a national observance. Six years later, prompted by the National Women's History Project, the event was expanded to encompass the entire month of March.

Learn more about National Woman's History Month online at www.womenshistorymonth.gov or scan this code with your smart phone.



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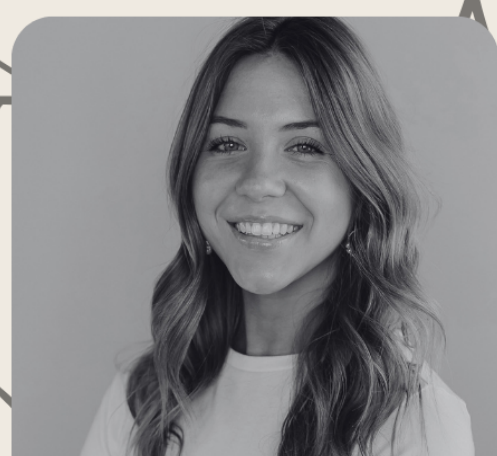
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Why National Women's History Month is Important

1. We haven't given women their due attention

For many years, women weren't acknowledged enough in historical texts. This isn't because they weren't in the midst of important discoveries or helping out with important conquests. It's mainly because men wrote the majority of historical documents for thousands of years. In March, we dig deep to uncover many of the important roles women have played throughout history.

2. Women are inspirational

Learning about women who have stood up for their rights and fought for what they believe is fantastic motivation. We all have the power to influence the direction our world is headed in, and National Women's History Month reminds us of that.

3. It recognizes the strength and power of women

It's easy to get caught up in the grind of daily life, but this month is an excellent opportunity to put a spotlight on all of the major things women accomplish each and every day. From domestic chores and carrying babies to fighting wars and governing countries, women are pretty darn amazing.

5 Powerful Facts about Women

1. Women have always been present

Women have always been present in the military, temporarily and voluntarily.

2. Army Nurse and Navy Nurse divisions

The Army Nurse Corps was created in 1901 and the Navy Nurse Corps was created in 1908.

3. Progressive 1900s

Married women were allowed to own property in their own name and keep their own wages in the 1900s.

4. First of its kind

The first college to accept women was Salem College, founded in 1772.

5. Who runs the world?

More than 30% of all businesses today are owned and run by women.

How to observe National Women's History Month

1. Put it in writing

Think of a woman you look up to and admire. She can be someone in your personal life or a public figure. Write her a letter describing the impact she has had on your life. Your thoughtful gesture is sure to be appreciated.

2. Have a girl's lunch

Lunch, breakfast, or dinner — it doesn't matter. Grab your granny, cousin Cheryl, or great-aunt Mimi and grab a bite to eat. Having the chance to spend some one-on-one time with the lovely ladies in your life is a great way to reconnect and remind them how much they mean to you. Who knows, they may even tell some interesting stories you've never heard before.

3. Read up on women's history

There are some excellent museums dedicated entirely to the accomplishments of women. If you don't happen to live near one of these places, many venues set up special exhibits during National Women's History Month.

www.nationaltoday.com/national-womens-history-month



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Our professional staff at the Women's Business Center stands ready to assist you in realizing your entrepreneurial aspirations. Partially funded through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration for Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties, we are committed to helping you transform your dreams into tangible success. Reach out to us today to discover how the Women's Business Center can support your journey to entrepreneurship.

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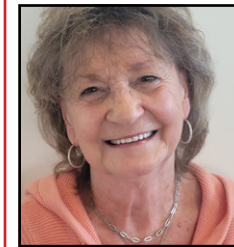
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Women's Service League

The Women's Service League is a nonprofit group consisting of talented local women who are dedicated to fostering volunteerism and enhancing the community through positive actions and leadership. Their mission is to raise awareness, funding, support, and overall growth for various charities, organizations, and community events that serve the under served population of Southwest Michigan.

Since its establishment in 1931, the committed members of the Women's Service League have generously donated their time and skills to establish numerous well-known events in Southwestern Michigan. From the annual Charity Ball to Operation Coats, each initiative by WSL contributes to advancing the goals of other civic and charitable organizations. Over the years, countless groups have benefited from the support of the Women's Service League. Furthermore, WSL nurtures volunteerism and service among the next generation of leaders through the annual Athena Scholarship, which is awarded to one or two outstanding young individuals that represent the culture that WSL stands for which is volunteering.

WSL focuses mostly towards completing service projects for other local nonprofit organizations. Whether it is crafting art projects, painting walls, tidying yards, or creating blankets, members of the Women's Service League united to have fun and serve others together.

Furthermore, they are deeply committed to fundraising efforts for this year's selected charity, the Readiness Center of Benton Harbor, which serves to provide a safe and nurturing environment where children can learn while also providing them with the tools necessary to succeed in school. Several activities and initiatives are being planned to not only raise essential funds for the Readiness Center, but also to raise awareness of the great work they do for the youth in our community.

The Women's Service League is a supportive sisterhood that, decade after decade, continues to make a significant impact on the communities of Southwest Michigan through service and fundraising. This year, the WSL is set out to achieve overall awareness for the league and are hopeful to add new members to the league and all the good work they do throughout the year. For those interested in joining, please email wslpink@gmail.com for more information.

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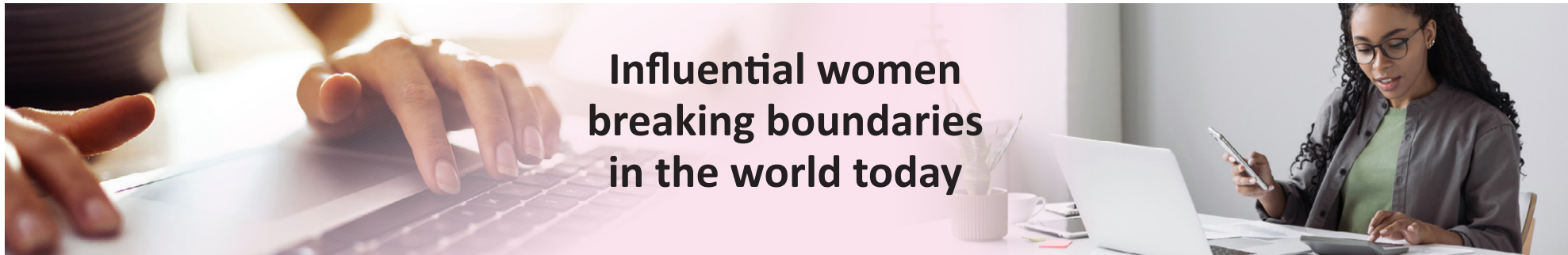
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Women's History Month is an opportunity to shed light on the accomplishments and contributions of women around the world. These five women are notable for breaking boundaries.

- **Xiomara Castro:** Castro was sworn in as Honduras' president in January 2022. She became the first woman to hold the position, and campaigned on expanding women's rights in that country.
- **Mary Barra:** As the CEO of General Motors since 2014, Barra is the first woman to lead one of the three big automakers. She has invested millions into the development of self-driving cars, electric vehicles and a ride-share service called Maven.
- **Giorgia Meloni:** Meloni took office in October 2022 as Italy's prime minister, becoming the first woman in history to hold the position.
- **Tsai Ing-wen:** Tsai took office as president of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in 2016, becoming the first woman leader (and the first unmarried president) of the country.
- **Catherine MacGregor:** This French businesswoman became the CEO of the French energy company Engie in 2021. She is the only woman CEO in France's CAC-40 stock index.

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After a tumultuous year with many ups and downs, there may finally be a light at the end of the tunnel. Growing confidence that the worst of the pandemic may be behind us has led many people to take inventory of their careers.

Women looking to change jobs soon may be exploring their options as they look for fulfilling, lucrative careers. The following are some profitable, in-demand career options, courtesy of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Forbes.com.

- **Chief executive officer:** CEOs are instrumental in both public- and private-sector industries. They are the top of the managerial food chain, and as such, command competitive salaries. A female CEO can expect to earn a median income of \$90,000-\$95,000.

- **Civil engineer:** The BLS predicts civil engineer jobs will grow by 11 percent by 2026. Civil engineers will be responsible for revamping aging infrastructure, including roads, dams and bridges. An average salary is \$67,000 per year.

- **Nurse practitioner:** Health care jobs are booming and in demand. Working independently or in collaboration with physicians, nurse practitioners provide primary care or specialize in various concentrations. Nurse practitioners earn a median annual income of \$98,000.

- **Pharmacist:** In addition to harboring a passion for providing quality health care to their communities, pharmacists often have a love for the chemistry involved in medications. Pharmacists must be licensed and possess a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. Pharmacists work in retail settings, but also in hospitals and clinics. The average annual salary for pharmacists is \$98,000.

- **Computer and system information manager:** A growing focus on inclusivity within STEM fields means now is a great time for women to pursue careers in these lines of work. Computer and information system managers plan, coordinate and direct the work of computer professionals while researching the latest trends in technology. Opportunities within this profession are expected to grow by 12 percent by 2026. Individuals in this field earn a median salary of \$90,000.

- **Management analysts:** Management analysts are brought in to find ways to make an organization more profitable or improve its efficiency. Travel and consultation may be likely, so those should be considerations. Management analysts earn an average annual income of around \$75,000.

- **Software developer:** Keeping up with the technological times means having up-to-date equipment and software. Software developers help to write code or design applications for company use. This is a quickly growing field in which professionals earn average annual salaries of \$85,000.

High-paying, stable jobs are out there for women who are in the market for a career change or trying to decide which fields to pursue.



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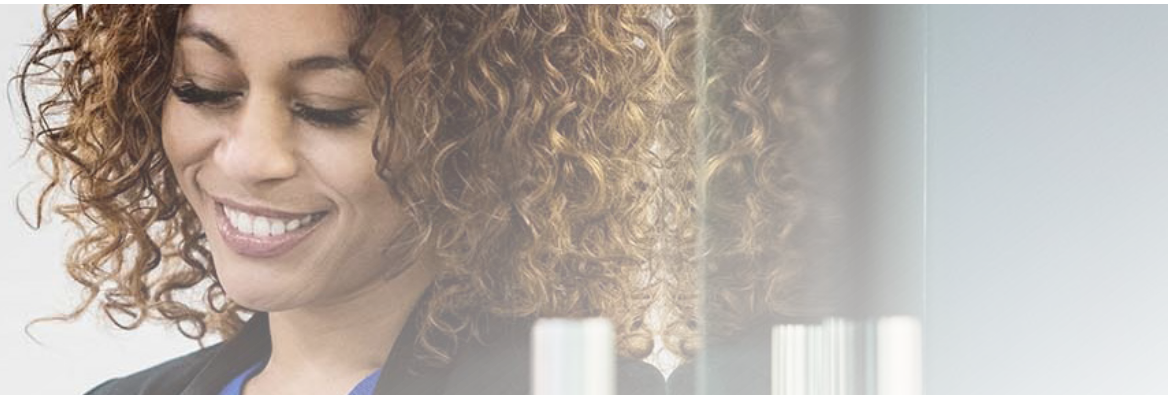
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How to create a greater work/life balance



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A more even balance between professional and personal life is a goal for many individuals. The demands of work too often extend beyond traditional working hours, leaving many professionals to confront work-related challenges long after they've left the office or left the desks in their home offices. With work never more than a smartphone notification away, it can be hard to create and maintain work-life balance.

Work-life balance is rarely discussed in terms of individuals' overall health, but that could be a mistake. In fact, the organization Mental Health America® notes that when workers' lives are balanced and workers are happy, they are more productive, take fewer sick days and are more likely to remain in their jobs. Each of those things benefits workers and employers equally.

With so much to gain from creating a greater balance between work and life, professionals can consider these tips to do just that.

- Make a concerted effort to be an effective communicator. MHA notes the benefits of being honest with colleagues and superiors when challenges feel overwhelming. Open and effective communication can be a great way to solve work-related problems, but MHA urges professionals to remain calm and suggest practical alternatives when confronting such issues. Simply accepting more work or responsibilities when you already feel overwhelmed can tip the scales even further away from an even work-life balance.

- Establish manageable daily goals. MHA reports that research has found that individuals feel less stressed about work when they feel as though they have more control over it. Setting daily goals is a great way to achieve that sense of control, and this can be as simple as creating a daily to-do list.

- Seek alternatives to your working arrangement. Previously unthinkable working arrangements are now possible after companies were forced to confront pandemic-related changes to their operations. If you've found it impossible to create an equitable balance between work and life, speak with your supervisor about alternatives to your arrangement. Flex time and hybrid working are some measures that could ensure you have as much time for your personal life as your professional life.

- Unplug at the end of the workday. One of the simpler, though not necessarily easier, ways to create and maintain a greater work-life balance is to unplug at the end of the workday. Turn off work-related smartphone notifications at the end of the work day so you aren't tempted to work during those of times of day that you've earmarked for your personal life. Smartphones can be addictive, so unplugging could test your resilience. If possible, block work-related notifications automatically after a certain time each day so you don't have to turn them off manually. Once the blocking is automated, you might not think twice about all those missed emails.

There's no secret formula for establishing a healthy work-life balance. But various strategies can help professionals achieve greater balance between their professional and personal lives.



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Women helping women – one woman at a time

100 Women Strong is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1998, that provides modest, one-time financial assistance to women in Berrien County who are ineligible for other community or state resources but find themselves in need of emergency help. Thanks to 100 Women Strong, these women do not have to quit a job, drop out of school, or let their health or their children's health deteriorate because no assistance was available. Individual Berrien County women who have an emergency financial need and meet the fund's qualifications may receive one-time financial assistance for an amount up to \$500 from 100 Women Strong. Over the past two decades, 100 Women Strong has helped hundreds of women in meeting tens of thousands of dollars' worth of emergency needs.

Throughout Berrien County, there are women who are working hard to improve their lives and the lives of their families. 100 Women Strong works by helping these women get past unexpected financial obstacles that threaten their efforts to remain or become self-sufficient.

100 Women Strong bridges a variety of needs:

- New Eyeglasses
- Automobile Repairs
- Emergency Dental Care
- College Tuition
- Utility Bills (water, gas, and electric)
- Rent and Mortgage Payments
- And much more

100 Women Strong also offers a scholarship in partnership with Lake Michigan College open to all women attending classes. We firmly believe that self-sufficiency cannot be reached and maintained without our community women being given every opportunity to grow and thrive in their educational, professional, and personal lives.

Nothing we say demonstrates the difference this emergency financial need can make for a woman quite as well as their own words:

"I just want to speak on the help I received. I fell on hard times, and I filled out paperwork for assistance. Typically, due to the pay bracket I'm in, I get denied through government assistance. 100 Women Strong stepped in right when I needed help and didn't deny me based on my income. We all need help sometimes and I was very grateful and think this is a great program for people like me who can't get help anywhere else. I've referred friends and even attended an event hosted by 100 Women Strong. It was lots of fun!" – Brandi C.

For further information on how you may qualify for assistance or wish to become a donor or join us on our Board, please call our Hotline (maintained through our strong partnership with another Community organization: Mosaic CCDA) at 269-332-1890, visit our website: www.100womenstrongberrien.com, or "Like" our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/100womenstrong.

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(left to right) Brandy Jaquez, Manager, Women's Business Center
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 Missy Holden, Director, First Choice
 Jillian Nadolski, Manager, Physical Development
 Kristen Patzer, Director, Women's Business Center



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The economy of Berrien County is advancing because of these strong women.
 Reach out to them for assistance in growing your business.



Have you ever received a gift that changed your life in unimaginable ways? Well, that is exactly what happened to **Denisse Santos**, owner of **The Lilac Loft** in St. Joseph, when her husband took her on a special and unique Valentine's Day date.



Denisse was the middle school Band Director at Benton Harbor Public Schools for ten years before she decided it was time for a change in scenery and voyaged to South Carolina, where she met her husband. While in the south, Rich gifted Denisse with a unique Valentine's Day gift of going to a candle making workshop. After the workshop was over, Denisse was mesmerized by the whole experience and was determined to learn and create more. So, she did just that.

Denisse started watching videos online on how to make candles and taught herself the ins and outs of the practice. She started making them in the kitchen of their home and soon began to sell them at local pop-up markets. Her very first market she signed up to be a vendor at, she ended up selling over two hundred dollars' worth of candles... which blew her mind. However, it also got her wheels spinning further on the possibilities of what she could do. After seeing what a success she had had at the market, she decided to start a website where she could take orders online and even set up a monthly subscription box of candles.

In 2023, Denisse and Rich decided to move back to Michigan and settled in the St. Joseph area. While still taking orders online, she quickly outgrew her kitchen counter and decided that it was time to rent a space to work. She landed a spot above Broad Street Café in St. Joseph, and it even had enough room to offer small candle workshop classes of her own. Her business continued to grow and when she heard of an opportunity for a bigger storefront location opened, she felt like it was a sign. The specific storefront happened to be the old Bagatini's music shop on State Street where she used to take instruments of her own when she was younger. It was like music to her ears!

Now The Lilac Loft can be found at 418 State Street, where you can find handmade candles along with other handmade goodies. Denisse has opened her storefront to other local women-owned businesses who have started where she did... in their homes. She currently has seven other vendors besides herself who offer things such as jewelry, lotions, soaps, Michigan souvenirs, and so much more. Denisse still offers different themed candle making workshops (which usually fill up fast) and even offers private events if you are looking for a unique gathering for friends, family, or special occasions.

When Denisse was asked what her goals are for the next five plus years, her response was "to be *THAT* place. You know, the one that everyone thinks about when they think of fun and unique things to do in our great area. I always want to be at the forefront of tourists' AND locals' minds when they want to have some fun". Trust me, after getting the pleasure of sitting down to get to know Denisse, I can assure you that you will definitely have fun. Denisse's personality matches that of a warm light (candle reference... get it?) and you can tell she has such passion for what she does.

To see a list of upcoming workshops, book a private event, or to find out more about The Lilac Loft, follow The Lilac Loft Facebook page, The Lilac Loft website, or scan the QR code below. The storefront is currently open Sundays 12:00pm-5:00pm, Tuesdays 12:00pm-6pm, Wednesdays 12:00pm-5:00pm, and Thursdays 12:00pm-6:00pm.



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