

2026

SALUTING THE WOMEN OF BUSINESS

IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

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Supplement to*

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Salute to Women: Leading with Purpose, Power, and Possibility



Sarah Spoonholtz
 Membership Director,
 SMR Chamber

This issue of *Saluting the Women of Business* is more than a recognition; it is a declaration. One that says leadership is not defined by title alone, but by impact. It is a recognition that progress in our communities, businesses, and institutions is driven every day by women who lead with resilience, intelligence, and heart.

data-driven decision-making with emotional intelligence and collaborative influence.

From the perspective of the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber, celebrating women in business is not simply a social imperative but an opportunity to recognize those who lead from both the front and behind the scenes. These women come together to create the ecosystem of growth that a competitive regional economy depends on.

When women are empowered to lead fully and authentically, the ripple effects are economic, civic, and cultural. For the Regional Chamber, supporting women in all roles is not ancillary work—it is central to building a stronger, more competitive region for all.

Across industries and sectors, you'll find women that are shaping the trajectory of our region. They are entrepreneurs launching bold ideas, executives steering complex organizations, elected officials guiding policy, frontline professionals delivering critical services, and every position in between. Their leadership is both strategic and relational, combining



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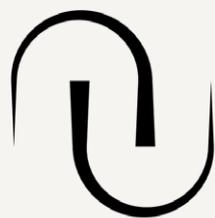


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Spotlighting Dr. Megan Yore - Sturgis Bank & Trust - The Pat Moody Award Winner

As a multi-generational resident of Southwest Michigan, Dr. Megan Yore, Chief Marketing Officer for Sturgis Bank, has served in leadership roles for organizations in and around our community for more than 25 years. Her career expands the healthcare, education, and financial services industries. Holding a Doctor of Education in Ethical Leadership from Olivet Nazarene University, she's also a graduate of the Lake Michigan College Leadership Academy, among other academic credentials. With a heart for volunteerism, Megan has helped more than 20 area organizations grow and thrive through board service and pro bono marketing strategy consultation. Some of those include Lincoln Township Public Library, Econ Club of Michigan, Michigan Society of Healthcare Planning, The Avenue Family Network, and the Krasl Art Center. She and her husband, Tom, happily remain life-long southwest Michigan residents.



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The Rise of Women-Owned Businesses in Southwest Michigan

Across Southwest Michigan, women are not just participating in business – they are building, scaling, and leading it. From downtown storefronts in St. Joseph to professional offices in Benton Harbor and manufacturing facilities throughout Berrien County, women-owned businesses are making a measurable impact on our regional economy.

National statistics show women now own more than 40% of businesses in the United States, and that momentum is clearly visible here at home. Many local women entrepreneurs launched their ventures after identifying unmet needs in the market. Others stepped into leadership roles through succession planning or family enterprises. Still others pursued entrepreneurship after corporate careers, seeking flexibility and greater purpose.

What often distinguishes women-owned businesses is a collaborative mindset. Rather than competing in isolation, many actively partner with neighboring businesses, share referrals, and support community initiatives. This culture of cooperation strengthens entire business districts.

Support systems have also grown. Networking events, mentorship programs, and Chamber initiatives provide visibility and advocacy that help women scale their operations sustainably.

The ripple effect is powerful. When women succeed in business, they hire locally, mentor emerging leaders, and reinvest in the community. They serve on boards, sponsor youth programs, and champion local causes.

Southwest Michigan's business landscape is evolving – and women are playing a leading role in shaping its future.



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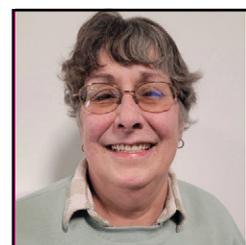
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Spotlighting Dr. Kimberly Pichot, Andrews University - Ambassador of the Year

Dr. Kimberly Pichot is a dedicated educator and consultant with a profound commitment to empowering women in academia and in the business world. Throughout her career, she has championed female entrepreneurs and provided mentorship to aspiring female leaders.

With a keen focus on fostering academic excellence and practical business competencies, Dr. Pichot engages her students through innovative learning activities designed to inspire confidence and growth. Her passion for facilitating learning and professional development extends beyond the classroom, as she leads students in impactful community service initiatives.

Before joining Andrews University, Dr. Pichot made significant contributions through her own consulting business, Complete Success, Inc. Her dedication to empowering women is evident in her leadership roles and mentorship programs aimed at nurturing over 300 startups.

Over the past three decades, Dr. Pichot has empowered countless entrepreneurs to

exceed expectations in their professional endeavors through specialized training and consulting services. Her expertise in organizational development, team-building, and strategic visioning has enabled organizations to thrive and succeed.




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Balancing Career and Family: The Modern Juggle

For many professional women today, success involves far more than professional titles or revenue goals. It also includes being present for family milestones, caregiving responsibilities, and community commitments. The balancing act can be complex – and at times exhausting – but it has reshaped how modern workplaces operate.

Women frequently serve as primary caregivers for children or aging parents while maintaining demanding careers. This dual responsibility has prompted a shift in expectations around flexibility. Hybrid schedules, remote work options, and family-conscious policies are increasingly viewed not as perks, but as practical necessities.

In Southwest Michigan, many women leaders speak candidly about the importance of setting boundaries. Blocking off time for family events, delegating effectively, and prioritizing rest are not signs of weakness – they are strategies for sustainability. Burnout benefits no one.

Balance does not always mean equal distribution of time. Instead, it often means alignment: ensuring that energy and attention

reflect personal values during each season of life. Some years may lean more heavily toward career advancement; others may require deeper focus at home.

The encouraging shift is cultural. Honest conversations about motherhood, caregiving, and ambition are becoming normalized. The expectation of “doing it all perfectly” is being replaced with realistic, grace-filled standards.

In Southwest Michigan’s professional community, women are demonstrating that ambition and family life can coexist – thoughtfully, intentionally, and successfully.



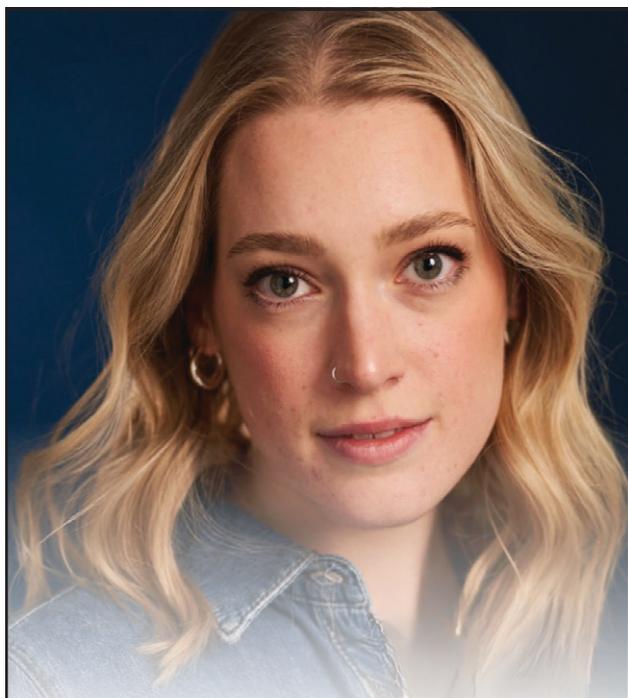
Cathy Yates, Benton Charter Township Supervisor

I continue to work toward making Benton Charter Township a better place for all to work, live, and raise their families. I am focusing on attracting more businesses, increasing housing development, and expanding parks for families to enjoy. Benton Charter Township continues to grow, and we are working to meet those demands.



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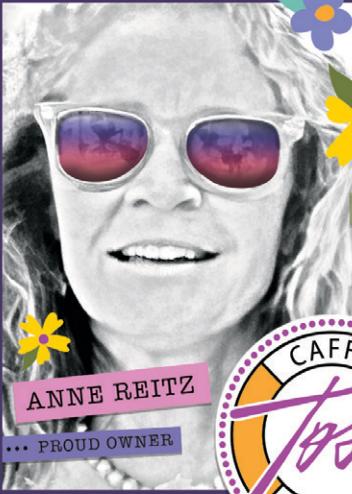

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**Spotlighting Cami Bowling, McCollum's at The Grant Hotel
- Best New Business Winner**

Cami Bowling isn't one to just sit around - by day she serves as the President & Owner of Core Bore Indiana and at night, you'll find her offering top tier customer service as GM and Co-Owner of The Grant Hotel & McCollum's Restaurant & Bar in Buchanan. At The Grant, you'll find a beautifully restored historic boutique hotel, blending timeless charm with modern comfort. Inside, McCollum's Restaurant & Bar delivers a lively, welcoming atmosphere with bold, creative dishes, a strong bourbon selection, and craft cocktails. Together, they create a destination where great food, great drinks, and small-town hospitality come together under one roof - much to Cami's credit. She's got the eye, work ethic, and passion for not just Buchanan but Southwest Michigan - and if you're lucky, you'll also spot a few celebs hanging out, such as Cami's daughter - WWE's Izzy Dame (Franki Strefling).



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Financial Confidence: Why Women Must Own Their Numbers

Financial literacy is one of the most powerful tools available to today's working women. Whether leading a company, managing a department, or building personal wealth, understanding financial fundamentals creates clarity and confidence.

Research consistently shows that women are more likely to experience career interruptions, often live longer than men, and historically retire with less savings. These realities make proactive financial planning essential. Owning your numbers – income, expenses, investments, debt, and retirement projections – transforms uncertainty into strategy.

For entrepreneurs, financial confidence directly affects business sustainability. Understanding cash flow, pricing structures, profit margins, and growth forecasting allows for informed decision-making. It empowers leaders to hire wisely, negotiate effectively, and weather economic shifts.

For employees, financial literacy includes negotiating salaries, reviewing benefit packages, and maximizing retirement contribu-

tions. Even small adjustments early in a career can yield significant long-term impact.

Across Southwest Michigan, more women are seeking financial education through advisors, workshops, and peer accountability groups. The conversation is shifting from budgeting alone to wealth-building and legacy planning.

Financial confidence is not about perfection. It is about awareness. When women understand their numbers, they make choices rooted in knowledge rather than fear.

Ownership of finances leads to ownership of future possibilities – both professionally and personally.



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They believe in keeping it simple (just like their menu): good treats, good times, and a whole lot of joy in every bite. Whether you're stopping by for a quick snack or bringing friends along for the fun, there's always a reason to say #meetme@zos. Follow along and see what's next for Zo's Mini Donuts! Stop by and see them in June for the summer season!




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Women Mentoring Women: The Multiplier Effect

Behind nearly every successful woman is another woman who offered guidance, encouragement, or perspective at a pivotal moment. Mentorship remains one of the most powerful accelerators of professional growth.

In Southwest Michigan, mentorship often develops organically – through Chamber events, nonprofit boards, faith communities, or simple coffee meetings. Experienced professionals share lessons learned from years of leadership, while emerging leaders bring fresh ideas and digital fluency. The exchange strengthens both sides.

Formal mentorship programs are also expanding, helping ensure access to opportunity regardless of background. These initiatives provide structured accountability, leadership coaching, and expanded networks that might otherwise take years to build independently.

The benefits extend beyond career advice. Mentorship builds confidence. It normalizes challenges such as negotiation discomfort, imposter syndrome, and leadership transitions. It also creates safe spaces for honest conversations about work-life balance and long-term planning.

Importantly, mentorship creates a multiplier effect. When one woman rises and intentionally reaches back to lift another, the impact compounds across industries and generations.

Southwest Michigan's business community grows stronger when knowledge is shared freely. Success does not have to be solitary.

When women mentor women, leadership pipelines expand, businesses thrive, and communities flourish.




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Mental Health and Sustainable Success

Ambition can drive remarkable achievement, but without balance, it can also lead to burnout. Many working women carry layered responsibilities – professional performance, family care, volunteer commitments, and personal expectations. The cumulative pressure can be significant.

Encouragingly, mental health conversations are becoming more normalized in professional environments. Leaders are acknowledging stress openly, promoting wellness initiatives, and encouraging employees to use earned time off. The stigma surrounding therapy, counseling, and stress management is gradually fading.

In Southwest Michigan, women entrepreneurs are designing workplaces that prioritize sustainability. Flexible scheduling, supportive team cultures, and transparent communication create healthier environments for long-term productivity.

Self-care is not indulgence; it is strategic preservation. Adequate sleep, exercise, boundaries around email access, and meaningful downtime contribute directly to leadership effectiveness. Burnout diminishes creativity and decision-making capacity.

Recognizing early signs of stress – irritability, exhaustion, reduced focus – allows for proactive adjustments. Seeking support demonstrates wisdom, not weakness.

Sustainable success requires pacing. Women who prioritize mental well-being model healthy leadership for teams and families alike.

By valuing both achievement and wellness, Southwest Michigan's business community is fostering a culture where high performance and healthy living coexist.






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I'm Alexandra Ranft the owner of Bare Naked Salts and Soap. At Bare Naked we use plant and mineral base ingredients, to create small batch all natural skin care products.

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Grab your girlfriends and mark your calendars – Women's Weekend in St. Joseph returns March 6th, 7th and 8th. Sponsored by Visit SW Michigan, the weekend features shopping, sipping, saving and celebrating the incredible women-owned businesses that make downtown St. Joseph shine.

Nearly two dozen local businesses are rolling out exclusive specials, pop-ups, tastings and experiences designed to make this the ultimate girls' getaway. Whether you're planning a day downtown or a full weekend, there's something happening around every corner.

The Boulevard Inn & Bistro invites you to stay with their HER Time Weekend Extravaganza, featuring a special room package, women-owned wine tastings, beauty and fashion pop-ups, hourly giveaways, specialty drink specials and even line dancing (by reservation). The Inn at Harbor Shores is also offering a special \$119 room rate with code WWSTJOE.

Retail therapy will be in full swing. DK Boutique is offering 50% off last season's clothing and 20%

off regular-priced items. Lana's Boutique takes 20% off regular merchandise, and Urban Garage Market features buy-one-get-one 40% off apparel plus a \$10 clearance rack. Yours Truly, Elizabeth will gift a free Stationery Happy Packet with purchase while supplies last.

Wine lovers can stop by Lazy Ballerina Winery for a wine tasting and receive a BOGO tasting coupon for a future visit, plus enjoy special pop-ups all weekend. St. Joe Wine Shoppe offers 10% off women-made wines and hosts a free Wine Sample Sunday from 1-5pm featuring women winemakers from around the world.

From spa specials at Revive Spa and EDIT Studio to cider sipping, specialty smoothies and artisan cheese discounts, Women's Weekend is your invitation to support local, celebrate community, and toast the women entrepreneurs shaping Southwest Michigan and celebrate International Women's Day.

For more information and participant offerings and specials visit: swmichigan.org



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100 Women Strong of Berrien County: Building Bridges to Stability and Self-Sufficiency

The mission of **100 Women Strong** is grounded in a simple but transformative idea: when women support women, communities grow stronger. For more than eighteen years, this grassroots nonprofit has been a lifeline for women across Berrien County experiencing financial emergencies – the kind that can quickly derail lives if help isn't available.

What sets 100 Women Strong apart is its focus on **one-time, modest financial assistance** for women who are ineligible for other public or charitable resources but find themselves facing sudden hardship. Whether it's an unexpected automobile repair, emergency dental care, rent or utility bills, or the cost of new eyeglasses – this organization provides up to **\$500 in critical aid** that can mean the difference between stability and crisis.

The women who benefit from this

support are often working, attending school, or striving toward long-term goals. Without this safety net, many would be forced to choose between basic necessities and staying in school or keeping a job – choices no one should have to make alone.

100 Women Strong operates with deep commitment and compassion, relying on community donations and volunteers to make a real difference in local lives. Its work doesn't just address temporary need – it protects dignity, fosters resilience, and allows women to

remain self-sufficient during times of unforeseen challenge.

In Berrien County, 100 Women Strong is more than a safety net – it's a reminder that support, even in small amounts, can lead to big outcomes for women and families throughout the region.



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Women's Service League

Women's Service League (WSL) is a dedicated group of local women committed to strengthening our community through service, fundraising, and partnership. Since 1931, WSL has brought together passionate volunteers who believe in rolling up their sleeves and making a meaningful difference right here at home.

Each year, WSL selects a local nonprofit organization as the beneficiary of a fundraising event. Through sponsorships, community partnerships, and event proceeds, WSL raises significant funds to support organizations doing critical work in Southwest Michigan. In 2025, WSL raised \$25,000 for CASA of Berrien County, supporting advocacy for children in the foster care system. In 2026, WSL is proud to support New Heights Community Development Corporation (CCDA), which provides transportation assistance, access to healthy food through its Community Food Network, and support through its Laundry Hub for families working toward long-term stability.

In addition to the Charity Ball, WSL leads Operation Coats, an annual winter initiative that collects gently used coats and winter gear

to distribute each November at the Salvation Army, ensuring local families stay warm during Michigan's coldest months.

WSL also awards the Athena Scholarship to a graduating senior pursuing post-secondary education who has consistently demonstrated volunteerism, leadership, and a commitment to giving back to the community.

Women's Service League is more than a fundraising organization – it is a network of women committed to service and community impact. Together, we are building stronger families and a stronger Berrien County. New members are always welcome.



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1 Chronicles 16:24 NASB*

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For Questions: Email jhansen@smrchamber.com



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