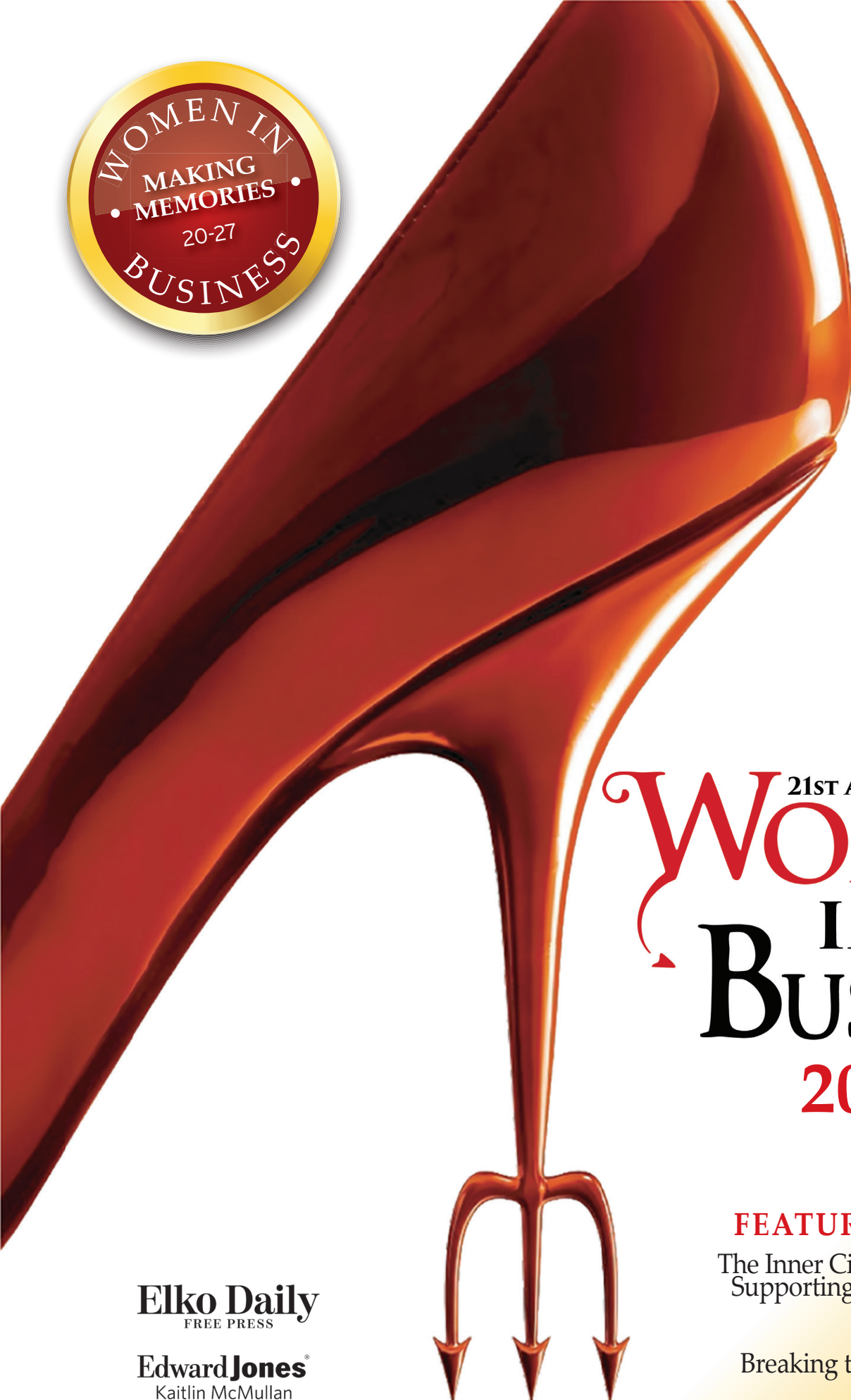




21ST ANNUAL
WOMEN
IN
BUSINESS
2026

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Edward Jones
Kaitlin McMullan

FEATURED INSIDE

The Inner Circle: Why Women
Supporting Women Matters
Page 36

Breaking the Glass Ceiling
Page 38

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21ST ANNUAL WOMEN IN BUSINESS

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Welcome to the 21st Annual Women in Business Event!

This year, we take inspiration from the iconic world of *The Devil Wears Prada* — a story of ambition, growth, resilience, and the courage to step into your power. Much like the women we celebrate tonight, this story reminds us that success isn't always easy, but it is always worth it. It's about learning, evolving, and ultimately owning your seat at the table.

In business — and in life — strong women don't compete to tear each other down. They support, mentor, and lift each other higher. True leadership isn't about being the loudest voice in the room — it's about creating opportunities, opening doors, and helping others rise along the way.

Tonight, we celebrate the women who are making bold moves. The leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and mentors who show up every day ready to take on challenges, redefine expectations, and inspire those around them. These are the women who know that confidence isn't given — it's earned — and that success looks different for everyone brave enough to pursue it.

As we gather this evening, remember that every connection you make, every conversation you have, and every story you share has the power to spark something meaningful. Whether you're here to network, celebrate, learn, or be inspired — you are part of something bigger. You are part of a community of women who are unapologetically ambitious, fiercely supportive, and ready to make an impact.

So, step into your power. Make bold moves. Build your inner circle. And remember — in the world of business, just like fashion, confidence never goes out of style.

Let's make this a night to remember.

Simply,
Susan Goddard
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Empowering Women Through Financial Confidence: Kaitlin McMullan of Edward Jones

In a world where financial confidence is key to independence and security, Kaitlin McMullan is making a meaningful difference—one woman at a time. As a financial advisor with Edward Jones in Elko, Nevada,

Kaitlin is passionate about helping women take control of their financial futures with clarity, confidence, and personalized care.

With a warm, approachable style, Kaitlin works with women from all walks of life—whether navigating a career change, managing wealth independently, planning for retirement, or rebuilding after life transitions like divorce or loss. She understands that each woman's financial journey is unique, and she takes the time to truly listen, educate, and create strategies that align with her clients' personal values and long-term goals.

Kaitlin's services include retirement savings and income strategies, estate and legacy planning, charitable giving, and navigating finances after divorce—all designed to support women in building and protecting their wealth at every stage of

life. She also takes pride in creating a safe, respectful space where no question is too small and every conversation is grounded in trust and understanding.

Women often face specific financial challenges, from the wage gap to longer life expectancy, and Kaitlin is committed to turning those challenges into opportunities. Her goal is not just to manage money—but to build lasting relationships that empower women to make informed decisions and feel confident about their future.

Backed by the trusted resources of Edward Jones and supported by her dedicated Branch Office Administrator, Jennifer Egan, Kaitlin provides hands-on support, thoughtful guidance, and genuine care to each client she serves.

If you're a woman looking to take the next step in your financial journey, Kaitlin McMullan is here to help you build a plan—and a future—you can feel great about.

To learn more or schedule a conversation, call (775) 738-8525 or visit her office at 2213 N 5th St Ste A, Elko, NV.





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A passionate advocate for women in construction

TIM BURMEISTER AND LYDIA SNOW

Mary Schwandt has taken another step up in the world of construction this year as she stepped into the role of chief operating officer at Acha Construction in Elko in January.

Some of the recent projects Acha has worked on include the Nevada Gold Mines Recreation Center and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints temple in Elko.

Schwandt started out at Acha 11 years ago, and has been a senior project manager for eight years.

Schwandt said that at Acha “I oversee all operations. That means all the job sites, equipment, employees and office staff. So, a lot of roles, a lot of management positions.”

Construction continues to stay interesting, because with every job there are new challenges to work through and learn from.

“We do something different on every project. Every project is a different scope of work,” Schwandt said. “The crew learns something new every single time they go out there.”

Schwandt credits the good team at Acha Construction for the company’s success.

“If you have good people working with you, they’ll take you everywhere you want to go.”

Along with her experience in construction, Schwandt also has military experience. She was a truck driver in the Army for six years.

Being a young woman in the male dominated construction industry can be challenging. Sometimes, male peers don’t want to listen to

Mary Schwandt became the chief operating officer at Acha Construction in Elko in January.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



her or take her advice.

“You have to go in there and really know what you’re talking about, because they will run you over.”

Schwandt has been tenacious through the years, and has been fortified by the work she has put into construction projects.

“Being in the industry this many years, I have the credibility and experience to back me up.”

Schwandt is a passionate advocate for women in construction, frequently speaking at industry events and conferences. She encourages fellow women in business to “have dedication, sacrifice, have passion for it, and keep your head up at the end of the day.”

“It’s your life and it’s your decision how you do it – especially for women in the mining and construction industries, you deserve a place in it.”

Along with her work at Acha Construction, Schwandt also has a lot of other roles that keep her busy.

In September 2023 she founded Valor Traffic Control, named in honor of her military background. As the president of Valor, she provides local construction companies with traffic control services in work zones. She writes traffic control plans and heads out in the

morning to check on her work crews on the highway.

Valor Traffic Control’s mission is to “safeguard work zones, streamline traffic, and ensure everyone goes home safe at the end of the day.”

In June 2025, Schwandt joined the board of directors of



Acha Construction teams have been working on constructing the Lander County Fire Station in Battle Mountain this spring.

Community in Schools of Nevada. During her tough years growing up, she was enrolled in Community in Schools, and they provided her with essential social services and supplies.

In her teenage years she juggled jobs and moved from place to place, and she ended up living in her car, until at age 18 she made the pivotal decision to enlist in the Army.

Schwandt credits Communities in Schools with helping her to believe she was destined for greater things.

“I’ve experienced firsthand the transformative power of CIS,” Schwandt said when she joined the board. “My site coordinator, Trisha Webb, played a pivotal role in helping me build a better life. Now, I’m honored to have a seat at the table, where I can contribute to creating positive change.”

“My journey is a testament to the fact that our past does not define us and that with the right support, we can unlock our full potential.”

Schwandt took on one additional role recently when she joined the board of the Trailing of the Sheep Festival in Idaho. In addition to her work in construction, Schwandt is also involved in ranching as a member of a multigenerational ranching family through marriage. She is continuing to gain hands-on experience as she navigates her role at the ranch.

Todd and Mary Schwandt at PAVE/X 2026 – The Pavement Experience convention in New Orleans in February.



Left: Mary Schwandt in the PAVE/X 2026 Roller Rodeo competition in New Orleans in February. **Right:** Mary Schwandt at the grand opening of the Nevada Gold Mines Recreation Center in Elko on January 29, 2026.



Mary Frost Schwandt, center, served in the U.S. Army for six years as a truck driver.



Acha Construction Project Manager Mary Schwandt at the open house contractor night at the newly constructed Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints temple in Elko in August 2025.



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Jesse James

“Believe in your
heart that you
know you can do it”

Jesse James, the broker/owner at Trinity Realty, is a proud Elko native who has spent the past 30 years building her career as a trusted real estate professional.

“I love working with my clients,” she said. “I built my business on integrity and faith and kindness.”

She said her advice for women in business is “don’t listen to the naysayers.”

“If you believe in your heart that you know you can do it, you will,” she explained. “I think it’s just all

about the heart, that you have to be genuine and you have to be willing to put yourself out there. And you have to be professional.”

As a mother, grandmother, friend, and neighbor, Jesse James brings deep-rooted knowledge and insight into the Elko and Spring Creek real estate markets. Her passion for the community shines through in every transaction, and she’s built her business on the

► see James, page 14



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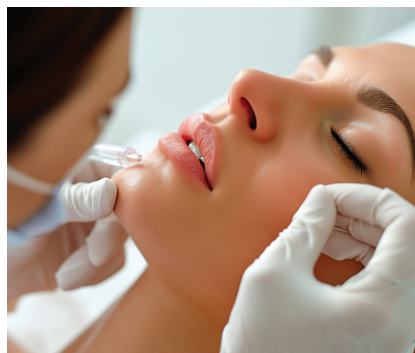
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Kaci Lynch

“I thrive on overcoming obstacles”

Kaci Lynch, broker and owner with Coldwell Banker Excel, has over 20 years of experience in the real estate industry.

“For 15 years I have dedicated myself to selling residential homes, mastering the art of negotiation and client relations,” she said. “Five years ago, I purchased the Coldwell Banker Excel Brokerage. As a broker, I have faced the challenges of managing teams and navigating the complexities that arise when transactions don’t go as planned.”

“In addition to leading the brokerage, my husband and I also own multiple businesses together including construction, investment and management companies. Balancing these responsibilities while

raising our three daughters has taught me the importance of resilience and adaptability.”

“I thrive on overcoming obstacles, whether resolving client issues or fostering a supportive environment for my agents. My true passion lies in helping develop top producing agents who serve our local real estate market with excellence, creating a positive impact in our community.”

Lynch said she has had a long-time interest in real estate, getting involved in the business while she was still in school.

“While attending Spring Creek High School I was able to assist

► see Lynch, page 14



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James, *continued from page 10*

simple but powerful belief that it's the little things — like promptly answering phone calls and being accessible — that make a big difference.

Over the years, Jesse has learned that the key to exceptional real estate service lies in always putting her clients first. That means listening closely, communicating clearly, and responding quickly. Her commitment to personal connection and professionalism has earned her a loyal client base and a strong reputation in the region.

As the heart of The Jesse James Team, Jesse leads with integrity and purpose. She's built a talented, service-oriented group that shares her values and commitment to excellence — not just professionally, but personally. Together, they're dedicated to making every buying or selling experience smooth, successful, and even enjoyable.

Jesse's first priority is always to help her clients feel confident and supported through every step of the process. She stays on top of market trends, embraces ongoing education, and leverages the latest tools and technologies

— ensuring her clients get top-tier service in a competitive market.

With decades of experience, Jesse has earned a reputation for excellence in the industry, guiding clients with honesty, professionalism, and a true passion for helping others find the perfect place to call home. She believes that real estate is more than just transactions, it's about building lasting connections and serving the people around her.

Grounded in her faith, integrity, and kindness, Jesse approaches every client with care and dedication.

Lynch, *continued from page 12*

a local agent and learn the business. I later obtained my real estate license directly after graduating high school, and from there I never looked back."

A focus on teamwork has been an important part of her business philosophy.

"I enjoy helping my team grow their real estate skills and learn more every day. I believe in a hands-on approach when it comes to teaching. Actions speak louder than words, so if you

want someone to do something you have to get in there and do it with them."

Lynch said it's important for her to plunge into each day with a plan for action.

"Getting up early and starting my day early has always been one of my favorite things. I can accomplish so much with a clear mind first thing in the morning. I am also a huge to-do-list girl, if it's not in my calendar or on my list it won't happen.

She also approaches each day with an eye on long-term goals.

"Great things take time — not everything can happen overnight like we want it to. But I have learned that helping people is not a sprint, it's a marathon, and finding ways to complete the marathon is what the day-to-day is all about."

Lynch is one of the local business leaders speaking at the 21st annual Women in Business event at the Elko Conference Center on April 18.

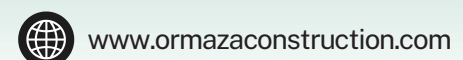
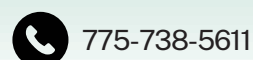
"I am looking forward to sharing my story at the 2026 Women in Business event with other like-minded women looking to grow."

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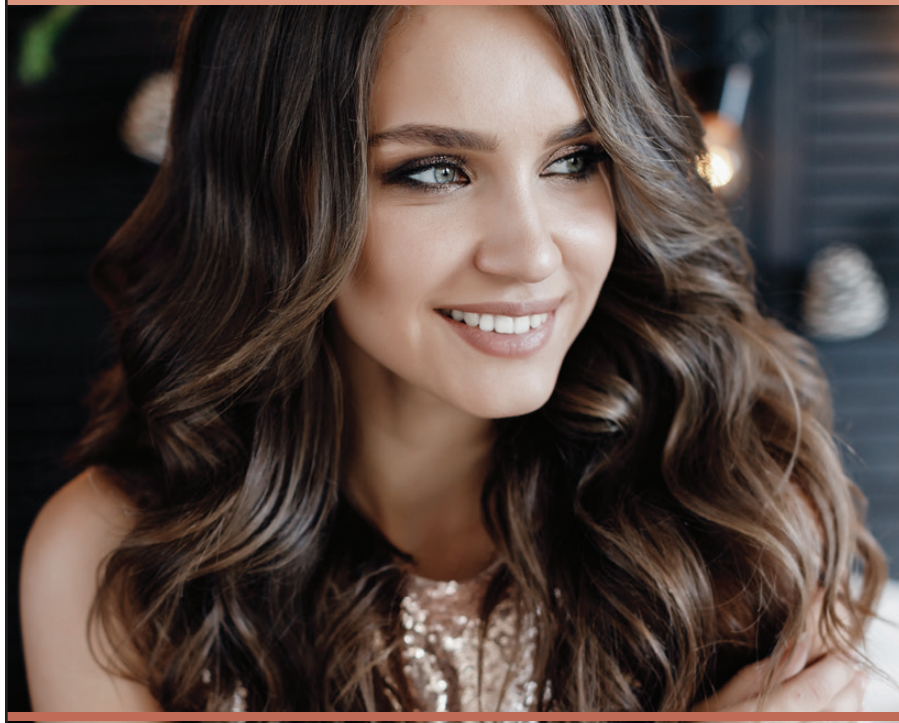
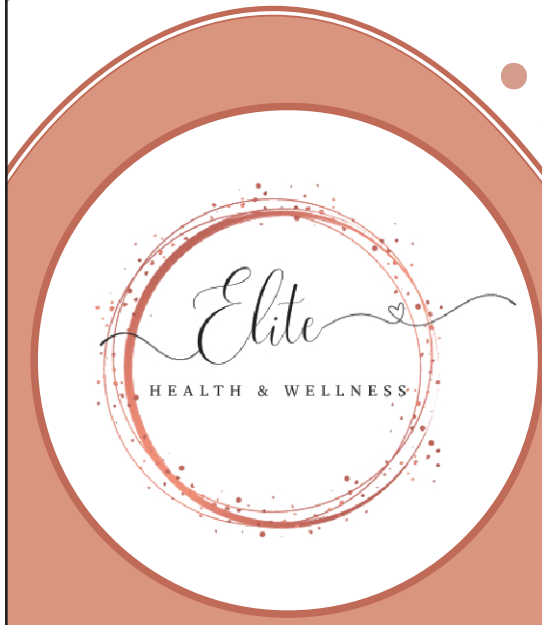
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The transformative power of plants

2 Wild Poppies keeps growing

TIM BURMEISTER AND LYDIA SNOW

When Molly Popp and her husband Mike decided to purchase the Col-
orscapes Greenhouse & Nursery in Spring Creek in August 2020, during the heart of the pandemic, it didn't seem like the ideal time to be launching into business ownership.

"We embarked on a journey that some might call bold, others might call crazy," Molly Popp said. "With the world facing unprecedented circumstances and businesses struggling to stay afloat, some questioned our sanity."

"But for us, it wasn't a question of rationality. It was the culmination of a long-held dream,

Molly Popp, owner of 2 Wild Poppies, in the main greenhouse.

LYDIA SNOW



► see Popp, page 18

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a passion that burned brighter than any obstacle the world could throw our way.”

Popp dug into the task of building a business with a vision to create not just a beautiful greenhouse, but also a place where people can feel a deeper connection to nature.

“I know for myself when I come into a greenhouse or a garden center, the weight of the world seems to slip off of my shoulders,” Popp said. “I wanted to create that same space for our community.”

“It’s more than just a sense of peace or tranquility — it’s a tangible connection to something deeper, something primal. Scientists call it biophilia, the innate urge to commune with nature, to nurture and be nurtured by all living things. And it’s this very essence that I wish to share with as many people as possible.”

“We believe in the transformative power of plants. Not only do they enhance our surroundings, but they also have the remarkable ability to uplift our spirits.”

Working with customers who come to 2 Wild Poppies helps create transformations all throughout the community. Some people are exploring getting into gardening, and they get guidance in planting their first tomato. Others are seasoned gardeners ready to redesign full landscapes.

“We believe your front porch can change how your whole neighborhood feels,” Popp said

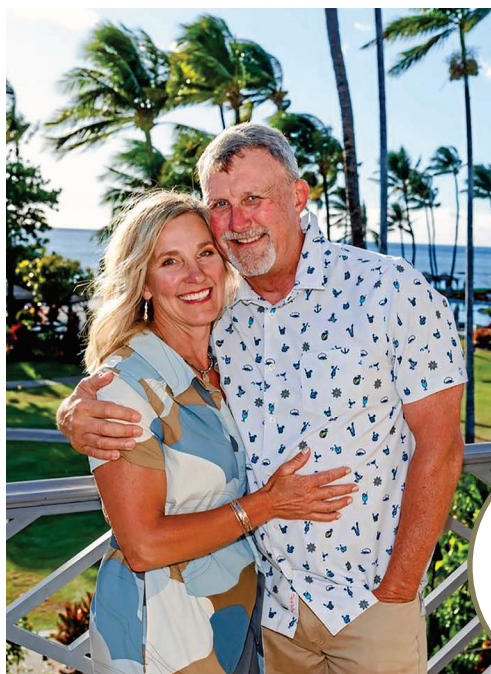
As the business has grown, the vision has also grown, and 2 Wild Poppies is now a community gathering place hosting farmers’ markets, local artists, workshops, wellness events, and birthdays, showers, and weddings.

“It’s really evolved from plants more into people,” Popp said.

2 Wild Poppies is now a nursery, a creative space,

A new greenhouse was under construction at 2 Wild Poppies in March. The greenhouse will be ready for the spring grand opening at 2 Wild Poppies on Earth Day, April 22.

LYDIA SNOW



CONTRIBUTED

Above: Molly and Mike Popp.
Below: Spring growth at 2 Wild Poppies.



Working in the 2 Wild Poppies greenhouse as spring-time arrives is a family project.
CONTRIBUTED

and a community hub ... and it’s still growing.

The nursery is seasonal and is closed during the winter, but as winter draws to a close and spring approaches, it’s always exciting as fresh shipments of plants arrive, and it’s time to plant and water and anticipate the flourishing of nature.

This year, 2 Wild Poppies has constructed an additional greenhouse, which will be ready in time for the spring grand opening on Earth Day, April 22.

There are a lot of challenges to running a business, but putting all that work into building your dream can certainly be worth it.

“It’s not easy to run a greenhouse or any kind of business at all,” Popp said. “It takes tenacity. It takes dedication. But also, if you believe in something and you have a vision, you can make anything happen — and you don’t have to lose sight of who you are in that process, either.”

“I’m a mom, I’m a wife, I’m a business owner, and I think you can be all of those things as a woman and still allow your heart to grow something pretty spectacular in a business.”



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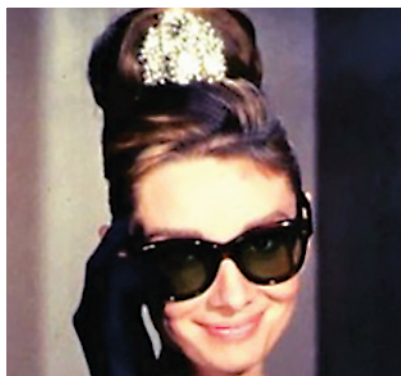
WICKED



Because I knew you, I have been changed for
Good.



*The most important thing is to enjoy your life—
to be happy—
it's all that matters.*



*Nothing is impossible, the word itself says
I'm Possible.*



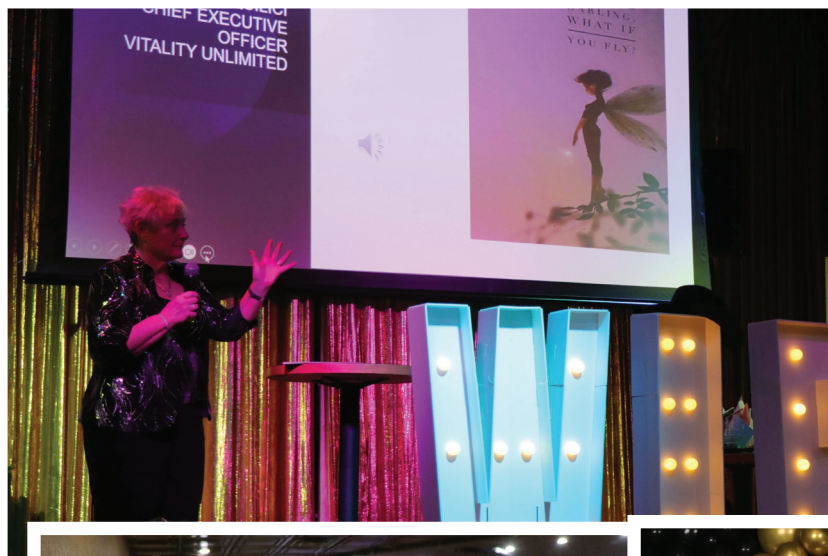
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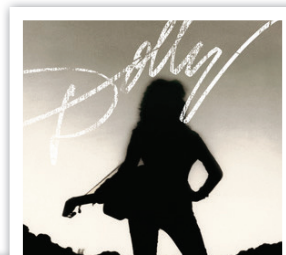
Behind every mask, there is a face, and behind that, a
Story.



*Don't get so busy making
a living that you forget to
make a life.*



You'll never do a whole lot unless you're brave enough to try.



Bringing Accessible Healthcare to the Community She Calls Home

After 17 years working in the local hospital as a registered nurse, Lori Ayala saw many patients relying on the emergency room when appointments elsewhere were booked weeks out or providers did not accept Medicare or Medicaid.

A photograph of Lori Ayala, a woman with short brown hair, smiling. She is in a clinic setting with a wooden reception desk and a door in the background. Above the door is a sign that says "Family is where our story begins".

"I didn't open A+ Total Care just to start a clinic — I opened it because our community needed better access to care."

— Lori Ayala

Lori Ayala

Founder & Community Healthcare Leader

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Facing challenges and **PROMOTING CHANGES**

Elko attorney Barbara Gallagher works on big hospital negligence case

TIM BURMEISTER

When people are awarded money after an injury lawsuit, the money doesn't really compensate for the damage that has been done.

But Elko attorney Barbara Gallagher of the Kidwell & Gallagher law firm says that besides any monetary payments, a lawsuit can bring other important benefits — by giving a voice to those who have felt powerless, and helping to bring about systemic changes to prevent other people from being injured in the future.

For the past few years Gallagher has worked on a hospital negligence case that this past fall resulted in an award of nearly \$952 million — one

of the largest verdicts in U.S. medical malpractice history.

"It's been a really tough case," Gallagher said. "It's a very sad situation."

Because of the incompetent care given during a delivery at a Salt Lake City hospital, a girl who today would be a typical six-year-old is instead nonverbal, with behavioral issues and seizures, and she will need care and medical interventions throughout her entire life.

Judge Patrick Corum, who found the hospital liable, said that the mother, Anyssa Zancanella, "would have been better off delivering this baby at the bathroom of a gas

station, or in a hut somewhere in Africa, than in this hospital. Literally, this was the most dangerous place on the planet for her to have given birth."

He said he "cannot think of anything more profound, total or complete" than the harm caused during the birth.

Zancanella told the Salt Lake Tribune that the first 39 weeks of her pregnancy were "so beautiful." Then she made a trip from her home in Rock Springs, Wyoming to Salt Lake City for a family birthday party. Her water broke, and she ended up in the nearby Jordan Valley Medical Center, which was owned by Steward Health Care.



Barbara Gallagher

SYDNEE RIZO-CANTRELL

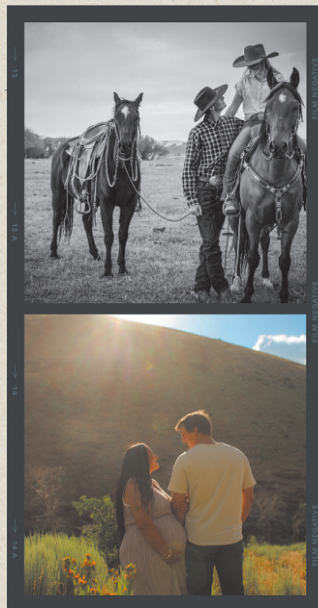
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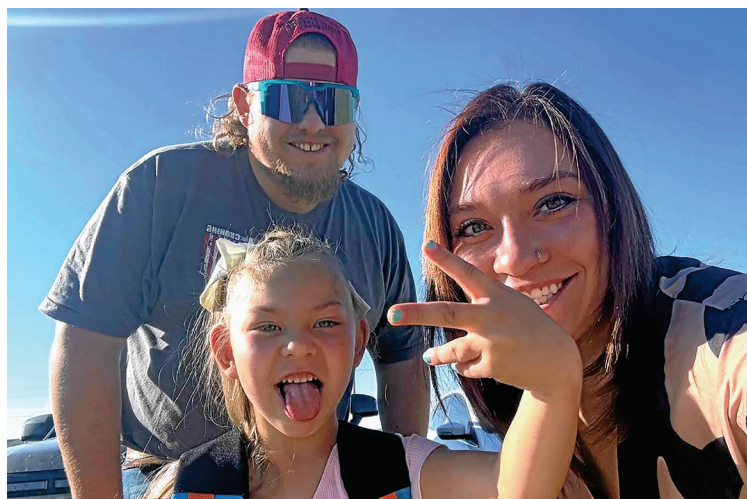
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COURTESY OF ANYSSA ZANCANELLA

Daniel McMichael, Anyssa Zancanella, and their daughter Azaylee. The family won one of the largest verdicts in U.S. medical malpractice history because of the incompetent care given during the delivery at a Salt Lake City hospital in 2019.

Gallagher said that what happened at the hospital was a series of increasingly terrible experiences. The charge nurse, who was not adequately trained to be a charge nurse, got mad and left when Zancanella's mother said, "Can you please stop poking my daughter and get somebody in here who can start the IV?" The two nurses who remained "were trying their best," Gallagher said, but they were just finishing their orientation and were not adequately trained in labor and delivery, and they were also not trained in chain-of-command and what to do when the charge nurse left.

A doctor was asleep down the hall.

The nurses administered dangerously high amounts of Pitocin to Zancanella for several hours. After more than 30 hours, the providers performed a C-section. The baby had suffered oxygen and blood flow deprivation and was born with a hypoxic ischemic brain injury.

Steward Health Care filed for bankruptcy in the summer of 2024. Gallagher said Steward continued to vigorously defend themselves in the Zancanella case up until June 2025, about two months before the trial was to start, and then they stopped paying and communicating with their attorneys. Zancanella's attorneys got a default in the case. A hearing to determine damages lasted about a week.

"Had the defendant been here," Judge Corum said, "I think the

testimony would have been lengthier and even more compelling, if that's possible."

CRISIS AND CHANGE

Gallagher said Zancanella's case highlights a serious problem in today's healthcare system that national legislators are now addressing.

Steward Health Care was once a very profitable hospital chain, Gallagher said.

"Unfortunately, it was purchased by a private equity group who did a lot of terrible things to eventually raid all the hospitals of their assets and take all of the profits without investing them back into the hospitals," she said.

"There's currently legislation in Congress that is aimed towards preventing private equity from being involved in healthcare, because my clients weren't the only ones that were injured by Steward Health Care running their hospitals the way that they did."

To help prevent private equity firms from plundering the health care system, the U.S. Senate introduced the Corporate Crimes Against Health Care Act in February, and the U.S. House introduced the Take Back Our Hospitals Act in March.

"The Steward crisis exposed the dangers of private equity taking over our health care system," Sen. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) said when the Senate bill was introduced. He said former Steward

Health Care CEO Ralph de la Torre “and his corporate cronies raked in record profits and left workers and patients to fend for themselves. We must pass the Corporate Crimes Against Health Care Act to end corporate greed in health care and prevent another Steward crisis from happening again.”

Gallagher said that historically, “it has been lawsuits that bring about change in industry.”

“Through legislation and through lawsuits, that’s how things get changed. It really does make a difference, and it’s why I believe in our justice system.”

“We have safety laws, and we have protections for consumers that a lot of other countries don’t have, and a lot of that has come about because of lawsuits.”

With Steward Health Care in bankruptcy with a liquidation plan, no money has yet been received in the Zancanella case. With Utah’s cap on noneconomic damages in

medical malpractice lawsuits, the amount awarded in the case has been reduced to a little over \$543 million, plus a little over \$2 million in attorney fees. The attorneys are continuing to work on getting payments through Steward Health Care’s insurance policies and bankruptcy proceedings.

A DEMANDING PROFESSION

Being an attorney, Gallagher said, “is very demanding work, there’s no question about it.”

“But I love what I do. I really do. I love being able to help people. I love giving people a voice who otherwise wouldn’t have a voice.”

“Sometimes the biggest reward for me is having a client who finally feels like they were heard, and they got to tell their story of what happened to them.”

Being a female trial attorney in a world that is still largely dominated by men can also be challenging.

Today more and more women are entering the legal profession. Legal Decision Lab said that female law student enrollment numbers have gone from just 9% in 1970 to 56% in 2024.

However, a study found that in 2024 only 17% of all trial attorneys were women, and only 12% of women attorneys gave an opening or closing statement.

Gallagher said she values giving young women attorneys guidance to help them advance in their careers.

“One of the highlights of my career has been helping other attorneys, young attorneys, particularly women, to mentor them, to help them in their professional development.

“That’s something that’s been very meaningful to me in my career. I didn’t really have that as a young female attorney.

“I just think it’s important to give back. And that’s something that I really enjoy doing.”

TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR

This year Gallagher received recognition for her achievements when the Nevada Justice Association, the state’s trial attorney organization, selected her as Trial Lawyer of the Year. Each year for more than 50 years the board of the association has voted to select a Trial Lawyer of the Year from those who are nominated. This year there was a tie, with the award going to Gallagher and to Las Vegas attorney Kimball Jones.

“In the history of the award, they’ve only had a tie one other time,” Gallagher said. “And I’m only the fifth woman who’s ever won it, and the only person from the rural counties who has ever won the award.”

“So it’s really an honor.”

The award will be presented at two black-tie galas in late June – one in Reno and one in Las Vegas.



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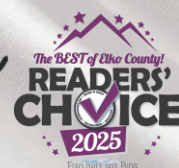


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Nancy Streets, who spent over four decades working in newspapers and was the Elko Daily Free Press' advertising director from 2013 to 2022, was inducted into the Nevada Press Foundation's Nevada Newspaper Hall of Fame in September 2025.

After working at the Salem, Oregon, Statesman-Journal in the 1980s, Streets was hired in advertising at the Sparks Tribune and the Big Nickel in Sparks — where she spent 22 years.

"I was the advertising director, which means at a small newspaper, you step in and do whatever you need to do," she said of the Sparks Tribune.

"If they were short-handed in production, I helped out," Streets said. "Part of my job was the lead

“It’s a very rewarding job to have in helping local businesses with their advertising. Because if a local business is successful, it makes the entire community successful.”

NANCY STREETS,
FORMER ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

person when we sponsored events such as the all-city track meet.”

While in Sparks, Streets also served on the board of directors for



PROVIDED

Nancy Streets was advertising director of the Elko Daily from 2013 to 2022.

the Chamber of Commerce and the Heritage Museum.

In 2003, she worked at the Comstock Chronicle in Virginia City, as the Sparks Tribune had purchased the paper and needed help getting familiar with it.

"It pretty much was a one-person show: running the newspaper, doing all the classified ads, all the legal notices, covering the county commissioners' meetings, writing them up as well, paginating the paper," Streets said.

As part of her tenure at Elko Daily Free Press, Streets worked with Elko County's seven high schools to run the Student of the Week scholarship program.

"At the end of the program, we had all of the seniors who were students of the week write an essay on community service," she said.

She judged the essays along with Elko Daily reporter Toni Milano and editor Jeff Mullins. Three of the students would each receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

That is now the AAA program and continues to this day.

Streets headed up specialty publications such as Women in Business, Northern Nevada Real Estate, and the Mining Quarterly. In 2017 she worked on "City of Elko: the First

100 Years," a commemorative book for Elko's centennial celebration.

"Anytime the newspaper was involved in anything, whether we were a sponsor with the Chamber on events or anything like that, I was the coordinator for all that," Streets said.

Streets also served on the Nevada Press Association Board of Directors from 2003 to 2022, spending two terms as president.

"When I was at the Comstock Chronicle, I was asked to join the board and represent community newspapers. From that, I developed a passion for community newspapers and the survival of smaller papers," she said.

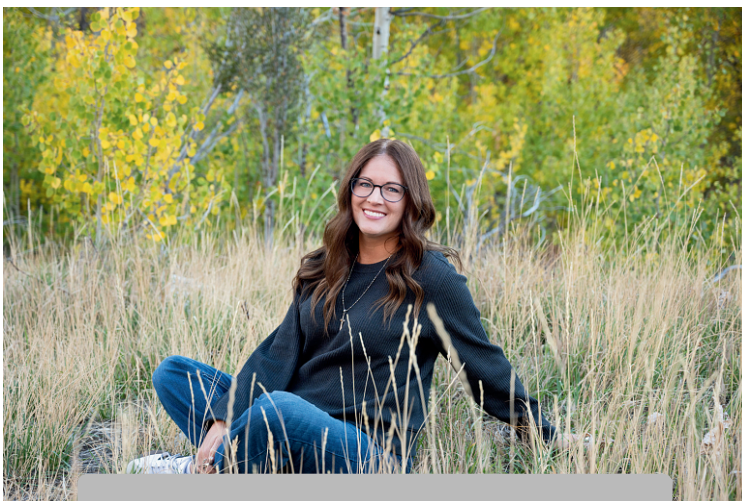
"Through the Press Association, the main thing that we fought with the legislature on was having legal notices published in the newspapers, because that's a big revenue source for newspapers," she said. "It's also important for the community to know where to find those notices. The local newspapers are the vehicle in every community for that."

But things changed with the digital revolution.

"When the internet came along, we were always threatened to lose that portion by the government agencies posting their notices on their websites. So, one of the things that we did was to create a statewide website where all of the newspapers in Nevada had a link on their website, so you could access all of the legal notices published in all the newspapers in Nevada," Streets said. "We also worked on a statewide ad buy, so you could buy a small ad and publish it in every newspaper in Nevada."

Like her career, advertising is there to help the community.

"It's a very rewarding job to have in helping local businesses with their advertising. Because if a local business is successful, it makes the entire community successful," Streets said.



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Candid business advice

BuzzBallz founder speaks at UM Women's Business Symposium

DAVID ERICKSON

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Perhaps one of the most famous products in the world ever invented by a University of Montana graduate is a brightly-colored, spherical, ready-to-drink packaged cocktail that comes in flavors like Grapes Gone Wild, Choc Tease and Watermelon Smash.

You've probably seen BuzzBallz on the shelves at a gas station or a grocery store. They're in all 50 states and 42 countries, from Chile to India.

On March 27, Merrilee Kick, the founder of BuzzBallz, gave the keynote address at the inaugural Women in Business Symposium, hosted by the UM College of Business.

In an entertaining, mostly off-the-cuff speech, Kick gave the crowd some candid advice for how to make it in the cutthroat world of starting a business without tons of cash.

"You Gen Zers, do not use lowercase letters,"

she said, chuckling. "This is a profession, and you're going to be asking for money from people that are much older than you. I know you don't like it, but you're gonna have to man up, woman up, and do it, right? You're gonna have to read email, not just text."

She told the audience not to post any inappropriate photos on social media.

She also told people to have a clear vision of what they want and what they want to accomplish.

"I enjoy meeting people, but one of the things that drives me crazy is people that have a terrible handshake, can't look me in the eye, can't tell me about what they do and they don't have a clear path for their future," Kick said. "Everybody's going to have some unknowns in their future.

Merrilee Kick, the founder of BuzzBallz, gives the keynote address at the inaugural Women in Business Symposium on March 27 at the University of Montana.

SHANNA MADISON,
MISSOULIAN



You have to have some kind of direction as to who you see yourself being when you graduate from college."

Kick graduated from UM in 1985 and founded BuzzBallz while she was working as a high school teacher in Texas. After growing the company, she later sold it and is now the CEO of GourmetLand.



At RAM Enterprise, empowering women is more than a value, it's a responsibility we proudly carry. We are dedicated to enriching the lives of women in our industry by creating meaningful careers, encouraging growth, and supporting each individual's journey to success. When women rise, we all rise, and we're honored to be part of that journey.

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Kick has gotten a lot of press over the years. A Forbes article from 2016 was headlined “How A High School Teacher Turned BuzzBallz, A Single-Serve Cocktail, Into A \$20 Million Business.”

A 2014 Deadspin article was titled “Hey Look, It’s The Sad Cocktail Grenades You Always Wanted.”

Kick told some wild stories and was blunt with her advice.

“You guys are all in this room because you want to start a business, or you have maybe some future business idea that you want to bring to life,” she said. “But some of you are probably not going to make it. Some of you will, but it depends on your personality. It depends on who you are, if you’re a fighter, if you’re a survivor, if you can research.”

The Women in Business student club at UM was co-founded by president Maya Haugan and vice president Brianna Shirley.

Haugan said she got the idea for the club while riding a chairlift during a women’s skiing event.

“About a year ago, I recognized the gap in opportunity for female leaders in business,” she said. “I believe the skills, experience and career

paths for women in business was an untouched area of growth.”

They’ve got about 60 members now, she added. “Our vision is to cultivate a thriving community of future business leaders at the University of Montana,” she said.

Shirley said she and Haugan talked about the idea over a game of spikeball.

“We kind of have, I describe it as a big sister, little sister kind of like a sorority of upperclassmen mentoring underclassmen,” she said.

According to a press release from the club, U.S. Census data shows that 20% of businesses in Montana are women-owned, which is lower than the national average of 37%. However, the number of businesses co-owned by women in Montana is 13%, and nationally it is 5%.

“I’m so proud of our students for taking the initiative to organize this symposium,” said Suzanne Tilleman, the Dean of the UM College of Business. “As Women’s History Month comes to a close, this is an outstanding way to showcase the achievements of women and mentor the next



BuzzBallz are found in all 50 states and 42 countries.
BUZZBALLZ



SHANNA MADISON, MISSOULIAN
Merrilee Kick, the founder of BuzzBallz, gives the keynote address at the inaugural Women in Business Symposium on March 27 at the University of Montana.

generation of leaders.”

The symposium also featured Sharilyn Campbell, the senior vice president and CFO of Sentara Health Plans, as well as Denise Grills, a certified coach in career and leadership development.

The UM Women in Business student club has an Instagram page for people looking for more information.

David Erickson is the business reporter for the Missoulian.

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THE INNER CIRCLE:

Why Women Supporting Women Matters

In *The Devil Wears Prada*, success didn't happen in isolation. Behind every powerful woman was an inner circle — trusted advisors, collaborators, and supporters who helped her navigate challenges, make bold moves, and step confidently into leadership.

Because the truth is, no one rises alone.

And in business — especially in communities like ours — that's never been more true.

Today's most successful women aren't just building careers. They're building networks. They're mentoring others. They're opening doors and creating opportunities — not just for themselves, but for the women coming up behind them.

Because when women support women, something powerful happens. Success becomes shared. Confidence grows. And leadership expands.

“Strong women don't compete — they build each other up.”

For years, women in business were often positioned as competitors. Limited seats at the table created an unspoken pressure — succeed quietly, and hold onto your place.

But today's leaders are changing that narrative.

We see women referring clients to one another. Partnering on projects. Mentoring emerging professionals. Celebrating each other's wins — and showing up when challenges arise.

This shift from competition to collaboration is reshaping what success looks like. Because when women work together, businesses grow stronger — and communities do too.

WHAT AN INNER CIRCLE LOOKS LIKE



20TH CENTURY FOX

Your inner circle might include:

- A mentor who helps guide big decisions
- A colleague who challenges you to think bigger
- A business partner who shares opportunities
- A leader who inspires your next move

The right circle doesn't just support you — it elevates you.

One of the most powerful aspects of the inner circle is mentorship. Many successful women can point to someone who encouraged them early on — someone who saw their potential, offered guidance, or simply gave them the confidence to take the next step.

“When women support women, opportunity multiplies.”

Now, those same leaders are paying it forward.

They're mentoring young professionals. Supporting new business owners. Encouraging leadership development. Creating space at the table for others.

Because leadership isn't just about rising — it's about reaching back.

And sometimes, those relationships start in the simplest ways — a conversation at an event, an introduction, or a shared experience that turns into something more.

Connections become collaborations. Collaborations become partnerships. Partnerships become lasting professional relationships.

That's the power of the inner circle.

The Women in Business celebration brings those circles together — leaders, entrepreneurs, executives, and rising professionals — all in one place, united by ambition, purpose, and support.

Because when women come together, incredible things happen.

Confidence grows.

Leadership expands.

And the next generation of women in business sees what's possible.

After all, success isn't just about how far you go — it's about who you bring with you.

That's the power of the Inner Circle.



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Breaking the Glass Ceiling *(In Heels)*

There was a time when being the only woman in the room was the expectation — not the exception.

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For many women, success meant stepping into spaces that weren't designed with them

in mind. And yet, they stepped in anyway — bringing confidence, resilience, and fresh perspective that continues to reshape what leadership looks like today.

Because breaking the glass ceiling doesn't always happen with a dramatic moment. Sometimes, it's quieter than that. It's applying for the promotion. Launching the

business. Speaking up in the meeting. Taking a seat at the table — and realizing you belong there.

“Breaking the glass ceiling isn't always loud — sometimes it's a quiet decision to step forward.”

Across industries — from mining and construction to healthcare, finance, and entrepreneurship — women are redefining leadership in powerful ways. They're leading teams, driving growth, and building businesses in industries that once had very few female voices.

And they're not just participating — they're thriving.

Many of these leaders didn't have a roadmap. They built confidence through experience, navigated challenges, and stepped forward even when they weren't sure what came next. And in doing so, they created new opportunities — not just for themselves, but for the women who follow.

Because every woman who breaks a barrier makes it easier for the next.

20TH CENTURY FOX



Breaking Barriers Looks Different for Everyone

Breaking the glass ceiling might look like: our community in the process.

- Taking a leadership role
- Launching a business
- Leading in a male-dominated industry
- Mentoring future leaders
- Redefining expectations

Every step forward creates opportunity.

In communities like ours, that progress is happening every day. Women are leading construction projects, managing financial firms, growing healthcare practices, and launching new ventures. They are shaping industries — and strengthening

The glass ceiling may still exist in some places, but it's cracking more every day — thanks to women who choose to step forward, lead with confidence, and lift others along the way.

“Every woman who steps forward makes it easier for the next to rise.”

The Women in Business celebration honors those who are redefining leadership, breaking barriers, and inspiring others. These women are proving that leadership isn't defined by tradition — it's defined by courage, vision, and determination.

Because when women lead, communities grow stronger.

And when women break the glass ceiling — they make room for everyone to rise.

And yes... sometimes they do it in heels.



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Investing in Elko's future

The Women in Business event selects the Elko Senior Center as this year's charity partner

TIM BURMEISTER AND LYDIA SNOW

Giving back to the community has always been an important part of the Women in Business event, and each year the event selects a charity partner whose mission aligns with long-term community impact. This year, WIB is raising funds to help the Elko Senior Center purchase a piece of property that will set the center up for future expansion.

This year's WIB event includes both a live auction and raffle to raise money for the Elko Senior Center.

The Elko Senior Center stood out this year as a great organization to help out because its work touches nearly every family in Elko County,



ELKO SENIOR CENTER

The Elko Senior Center is more than 50 years old and has been at its current location for about 25 years. The center is outgrowing this location and is preparing for the future by raising funds to purchase a larger piece of property to the west.

whether directly or indirectly. Supporting the center's property purchase means investing in parents, grandparents, neighbors, and ultimately, Elko's future.

The Elko Senior Center has been a place of connection, care, and friendship for more than 50 years. From daily meals to social engagement and essential services, the

center supports seniors in ways that strengthen not just individuals, but families and the wider community.

► see *Senior Center*, page 42

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-Amy Morin



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The community at the senior center has seen a lot of growth in recent years.

"Since Covid-19, we've nearly doubled the amount of meals that we serve," said Matt McCarty, the executive director of the Elko Senior Center.

They now often nearly reach the full capacity of the dining room, which can serve about 128 people.

With so many people coming to the center, the parking lot can fill up, and then some people end up parking on Indian View Heights Drive.

"Which is, of course, not ideal, and it's not very safe, either," McCarty said.

When the senior center began investigating the possibility of expansion about a year ago, they reached out to a local Realtor to look at property and buildings in Elko, but they found there were not many viable options. However, they did find that there is a good piece of property available just about a half mile from their current location, which will keep the senior center centrally located in Elko.

The Elko Institute of Academic Achievement owns nearly 10 acres of land at the corner of College Parkway and Ruby Vista Drive, across from Peace Park.

"We've entered into a contract with them," McCarty said. "They've been exceptionally generous and given us one year to raise the funds."

The purchase price is \$950,000, and the center made a \$100,000 earnest-money deposit.

"This 9.75-acre lot will have plenty of room for parking, and the idea would be for us to build a new senior center that would be able to be expanded upon, so that generations will be able to enjoy it," McCarty said.

"Our current building is only 25 years old, but unfortunately, it wasn't built to be expanded," he said.

"The idea is to secure the land now, because while we may not



Elko Senior Center Director Matt McCarty speaks at the 2025 volunteer appreciation dinner at the center.



Elko Senior Center Director Matt McCarty on the Schwinn tricycle which was the prize in the center's fundraiser raffle last spring.

“There’s always good food and we’ll be able to accommodate anybody, whether for lunch or activities.”

MATT MCCARTY,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE
ELKO SENIOR CENTER

need a building immediately, by the time we do need a building, the concern is that there won't be very many options available to us."

McCarty said in March that the



ELKO SENIOR CENTER PHOTOS

Elizabeth Bernabe, who was crowned the first Miss Preteen Elko County last summer, enjoys visiting the Elko Senior Center and playing the piano and cello for the audiences there. Within her first month as Miss Preteen Elko County, Elizabeth raised \$475.46 for local Special Olympics through lemonade stand sales, and she presented the donation to the Special Olympics Nevada area directors at the Elko Senior Center in July.

center had reached about 35% of their fundraising goal for the land purchase. He said there is a chance that a private family foundation may make a significant contribution this spring to help get the center closer to its goal.

The funds raised at the WIB event will also play an important role in helping the center reach its goal so that it can invest in the future of the community.

The center invites everyone to stop in and spend time there, regardless of age.

"There's always good food and we'll be able to accommodate anybody, whether for lunch or activities," McCarty said.

Over the years, WIB has raised funds and awareness for a wide range of organizations addressing critical needs in the community, including Zero Suicide, the Committee Against Domestic Violence, the Nevada Institute of Forensic Nursing, and many others. These partnerships reflect WIB's belief that leadership and community responsibility go hand in hand.



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