Lebanon's Women Trailblazers

By Suzanne Biever

As March commences, so does Women's History Month. The National Women's History Project has dubbed March 2017 as "Honoring Trailblazing Women in Labor and Business." According to their website, the project's 2017 theme aims to honor "women who have successfully challenged the role of women in both business and the paid labor force. Women have always worked, but often their work has been undervalued and unpaid."

Margaret Mead, herself a trailblazer as a female cultural anthropologist, once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. Lebanon, PA, has had its own series of female trailblazers over the years committed to the Lebanon community and intent on enhancing the quality of life for all who call it "home."

The Lebanon County Commission for Women, an organization originally founded in 2003 with the intent to "inform and advise the Commissioners on issues of concern to women in Lebanon County," aims to acknowledge a handful of these trailblazing women in this four-part article series. The series will focus on women executives, women business founders, family-owned businesses headed by women, and women entrepreneurs. The commission acknowledge that there is no possible way that it could do credit to all of the inspirational female figures throughout Lebanon's history. The women trailblazers mentioned in this article series represent merely a fragment of that population.

The first category highlighted is that of women executives. Loreen Burkett, our first executive to be featured, has practiced law in Lebanon County since 1988 when she graduated from Dickinson School of Law. Since 2000, she has been a conciliator and divorce master for the Lebanon County Court of Common Pleas. Burkett has also served as the county's Guardian Ad Litem since 1991. In the community, Burkett has served on various nonprofit committees, including the Lebanon County Commission for Women, Domestic Violence Intervention, Lebanon Valley Sertoma, and United Forces for Veterans.

Kristen Watts has excelled as a leader in the banking industry since beginning her career with Fulton Bank in 1989. In 1997, she was promoted to vice president and served as a commercial banker until she was promoted again in 2010 to senior vice president and senior lender. Most recently, Watts rose to the position of market leader of the Lebanon division in 2014. Within her community, Watts has worked with such nonprofits as Developmental and Disability Services and the Lebanon Community Library.

Check back next week for the next installment of our article series featuring women founders. The Lebanon County Commission for Women annually promotes a number of events, including the Glass Slipper Project held in February which collects prom dresses and sells them for $10 each to young ladies within Lebanon County, and the Hall of Fame Luncheon, which honors women who have made significant contributions to Lebanon County through their profession and/or volunteerism while serving as role models. Additional information about these events and the commission itself are available at www.lebanoncounty.org/womens_commission.