

The Beginnings....

1977 - An Act Concerning Displaced Homemakers passed by the 108th Legislature

Tish Sommers and Laurie Shields first coined the term displaced homemaker. One a widow, the other divorced, the name they created evoked the jarring experience shared by many mid-life and older women thrust out of their primary role as homemakers and into the unfamiliar world of employment.

Following a national women's gathering in Texas in 1977, several Maine women lawmakers were inspired by the new displaced homemakers movement and submitted legislation that ultimately led to the founding of Maine's Displaced Homemakers Program. Merle Nelson, then a representative from Portland, and Barbara Trafton, a Senator from Lewiston, were the primary movers behind the bill that established what is now known as the Maine Centers for Women, Work, and Community, with a \$10,000 appropriation in 1978.

In 2004, the organization awarded Merle Nelson the first annual Women Making a Difference Award for her pioneering role in creating what remains a unique women's economic development organization.

“Changing lives, building community, one woman at a time.”

Milestones:

1978 - 1983

1978 - Direct services began through a Center and toll-free information resource line at the University of Maine at Augusta **1979** - Services expanded to Waterville **1981** - First annual Legislative Day for displaced homemakers held at the State House **1982** - Centers opened in Bangor and Lewiston-Auburn; -Women's Business Survival Skills pilot project funded by the Small Business Administration. **1983** - Centers opened in Bath and Portland

1984 - 1988

1984 - First New England Conference for displaced homemakers held in Maine **1985** - New Ventures Entrepreneurship Training launched in Brunswick; - Venturing Forth: a Guide for Women Going into Business published. - Five Year VISTA volunteer Rural Community Resource project initiated - Center in Presque Isle opened. **1986** - Women and Power Conference. **1987** - Centers opened in Farmington, Thomaston,

Saco, Houlton and outreach to Ellsworth. **1988** Tenth Anniversary Celebration.

1989 -1993

1989 - ABC World News with Peter Jennings featured Maine Displaced Homemakers Program in 5 minute special - Katahdin Region Center opened in E. Millinocket **1990** - Skowhegan Center opened **1991** - Participants delivered slices of homemade pie to policymakers during Legislative Awareness Day to symbolize women's fair share of economic pie **1992** - Second Five Year VISTA Volunteer Economic and Community Development Project launched New England Institute on Women and Economic Development **1993** - 15th Anniversary Celebration

1994 - 1998

1994 - New name: **Maine Centers for Women Work and Community** announced (WWC) USDOL-funded multi-year collaborative microenterprise project Maine Enterprise Option implemented; WWC plays major role. Statewide contract with Maine DHS to provide self-employment services - New Ventures Loan Fund established **1995** - MCWWC represented at NGO Forum on Women in Beijing China - Women's economic leadership curriculum expanded **1996** - Maine Women's Economic Advocacy Institute held **1997** - Selected to participate in Aspen Institute's MicroTest project to develop performance measures for microenterprise industry **1998**. Maine Family Development Account program established - Maine Women's Fund Award to MCWWC staff for work empowering women and girls - 20th Anniversary Celebration

1999 - 2003

1999 - Rural Women Leaders and Entrepreneurs from Slovakia tour Maine as guests of WWC for three weeks in July **2000** - First FDA account holder purchases her home using her matched savings "Financing Your Future" money management class created **2001** - A delegation of women from the former Yugoslavia arrive in Maine for a study tour on September 10. Building communities, women's leadership take on new meaning in the aftermath of terror attack - Publication of "Women on the Job: Making it work for you" - An employers guide, funded by MDOT - First Totally Trades Conference held in Bangor **2002** - Received three year capacity-building grant from the Maine Community Foundation - Women's Economic Security Project initiated in collaboration with groups from around the state; WWC joins Earned Income Tax/VITA program services **2003** - Services begin in Washington County from offices located at Washington County Community College,

Calais - First "Creating Your Future" class offered

2004- 2008

2004 - 25th Anniversary Celebration held - First Merle Nelson Women Making a Difference Award presented to Merle Nelson - - Unveiling of new logo - Get Out the Vote campaign initiated as part of the Women's Economic Security collaboration **2005** - Legislator and Funders Reception featured publication of *Small Steps, Big Changes, 25 Women in the Maine Economy* - Awarded Microenterprise Acceleration Program technology grant from HP. **2006** - Second Merle Nelson WMD Award presented to Anne Schonberger - Life Long Learning Accounts (LiLA's) pilot project initiated with support from the Ford Foundation and the US Department of Labor. WWC provides Career Advising to account holders. - Creative Enterprise project begins, engaging artists, artisans and crafters in training, networking. Mini-grants awarded to spur joint marketing efforts. **2007** Ambassador Club launched in MidCoast offering program graduates the chance to 'give-back' and further their leadership skills. **2008** US DOL two year Research and Evaluation Grant awarded to support and measure effectiveness of core services.

2009 – 2011

2009 – Staff, Advisory Council members, and Ambassador/graduates undertake new Strategic Planning process supported by MMEP using Balanced Scorecard. - 30th Anniversary Celebration – Third Merle Nelson Women Making a Difference Award presented to Betsy Sweet -- *Creating the Future: 30 Stories from the Maine Economy* profile book published. 30 Champions honored in celebrations around the state throughout the year– **2010** Multi-year grant from Betterment supports the development of on-line/blended Career Exploration classes. – SBA PRIME grant supports technology and financial management resources for micro enterprises; partnership with Maine SBDC leads to web- based workshops and videos. **2011** First statewide Ambassador training and networking day focuses on skill building in advocacy, development and outreach - Fourth Merle Nelson Women Making a Difference Award presented to Mary Cathcart. –