



## **New Ventures Maine History**

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 New Ventures Maine, with a \$10,000 appropriation in 1978.

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

### **The First Five Years: 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

- The 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 (MCWWC) announced  
USDOL-funded collaborative microenterprise project

- Maine Enterprise Option implemented; WWC plays a 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** - 20th Anniversary Celebration held

Maine Family Development Account program established

Maine Women's Fund Award to MCWWC staff for work empowering women and girls

#### **1999 - 2003**

**1999** - Rural Women Leaders and Entrepreneurs from Slovakia tour Maine as guests of New Ventures  
Maine 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 arrives 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 employer's guide, funded by MDOT

**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

**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

- First Merle Nelson Women Making a Difference Award presented to Merle Nelson
- Get Out the Vote campaign initiated as part of the Women's Economic Security collaboration
- Unveiling of new logo

**2005** - Legislator and Funders Reception featured publication of *Small Steps, Big Changes, 25 Women in the Maine Economy*

- Blaine House Tea held to honor women profiled in booklet
- Awarded Microenterprise Acceleration Program technology grant from HP. Business Resource  
Centers open in Portland, Bangor and Augusta

- Trickle-Up grants to low-income entrepreneurs now offered through WWC

**2006** - Second Merle Nelson Women Making a Difference Award presented to Anne Schonberger

- LifeLong 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 targeted training and networks.

### **2009 – 2013**

**2009** – Expanded access and digital literacy through distance learning, offering workforce and business classes offered online and in blended format.

### **2014 – 2018**

**2014** – Expanded role with CA\$H Maine to provide coordination and build capacity of CA\$H Maine coalitions to help tax customers build assets and increase financial capability.

**2015** – Developed a new organization identity, New Ventures Maine (NVME), to reflect expanded target populations and scope of services.

**2017** - Collaborative grant with Maine Centers to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV) with provisions to provide financial literacy training to survivors and offer Independence Savings Program accounts - matched savings accounts encouraging survivors to set up emergency savings accounts.

### **2019 – Present**

**2019** – 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. Merle Nelson Women Making a Difference Award presented to Barbara Trafton.

**2020** – Responded to Covid-19 pandemic circumstances: transitioned programming and advising online; adapted training to address changing workforce, business, and financial realities; adapted Totally Trades! sessions to be offered online statewide; and addressed disproportionate challenges for women through pandemic-responsive programming.

**2021** – Executive Director of 43 years, Gilda Nardone retires.

- Janet Smith, longtime staff member, is hired for the leadership role.

**2023** – Changed Totally Trades name to Trades for ME; updated logo and launched tradesforme.org website

- Celebrated NVME's 45th Anniversary

**2025** - 20th Anniversary of Trades Conferences for middle and high school youth