

The Albion Pleiad



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Albion's Women Business Owners on Growth; 'Supportive' Community



Co-owner of Stirling Books & Brew and co-founder of Urban Blue Development and Properties Staci Stuart sits in Stirling's central room. According to Stuart, she and her husband, Jim Stuart, manage living spaces available for rent above the storefront (Photo illustration by Bonnie Lord).

Abigail Quinones
Volunteer Multimedia Journalist

Anna Merritt, owner of Anna's House of Flowers, located in downtown Albion, said when she opened her store over 40 years ago, there were fewer women business owners than there are today.

In the '80s, Merritt added, women couldn't borrow money from a bank because a man's presence was necessary for them to do so. Merritt said she was only able to take out her loan because she had a connection with a man who had some status at the bank.

In 2024, the National Women's Business Council reported that there are 14.5 million women-owned businesses throughout the U.S. Some of those women-owned businesses, like Merritt's, have made their home in the city of Albion.

Anna's House of Flowers



Owner of Anna's House of Flowers Anna Merritt adjusts flowers in a green Saint Patrick's Day flower arrangement. According to Merritt, "everybody" that works at the shop "has been in Albion for all their life" (Photo illustration by Abigail Quinones).

Gaining Inspiration

Albion has its roots in the manufacturing industry, but over time that industry relocated to other areas.

With businesses moving and workers following, the Washington Gardner middle school and hospital went with it. This led to a decline in general business within Albion, Merritt said.

Jenny Risner-Wade, owner of YellowBird Chocolate Shop and co-owner of the Albion Malleable Brewing Company, said she noticed a "resurgence of energy and inspiration to revitalize Albion" in recent years.

Risner-Wade said she first opened the Malleable with her husband to be a part of this movement for more downtown businesses. Then, her desire for an "alternative, allergen-free treat" led her to open YellowBird

Chocolate Shop in 2020.

For co-owner of Urban Blue Development LLC, a business primarily focused on lead abatement, Staci Stuart, she gained inspiration from the TV show "Flip This House" in 2006. Stuart said she thought, "I could do that," and later opened the business with her husband in 2015.

Merritt's inspiration came from a phone call with a "good friend" before the revitalization of Albion and before the 1988 Women's Business Ownership Act, which allowed women to take out a loan without a male cosigner. This friend asked Merritt if she would like to open a business, and while she initially said no, she changed her mind a few weeks later.

Merritt said she called him and said, "I can do flowers, and I know I'm good at that. I

think I wanna do a flower shop."
Support from the Albion Community

When it comes to creating trust, Merritt said, business owners need community members "more than they need us."

"The community gets to know you and trusts you, and so we cannot let that trust ever decline, never," Merritt said.

In addition to the general population, which Risner-Wade deems as "super supportive of bringing a business to Albion," organizations such as the Albion Economic Development Corporation (EDC) exist to aid small businesses within Albion.

YellowBird Chocolate Shop received an award in 2021 from the Michigan EDC, which would not have been possible if not for the Albion EDC's sponsorship, Risner-Wade said. "As history has it," Risner-Wade added,

the Albion EDC has "pretty much always" been led by women. She said she believes that they are "always cognizant and looking for opportunities" for Albion's women business owners.

On a day-to-day level, Risner-Wade said she makes the occasional chocolate sample delivery – a short conversation and some fresh-made chocolate – to Kids 'N' Stuff, a children's museum directed by Katie Gigliotti, across the street.

To Aspiring Women Business Owners

According to Risner-Wade, there are several online communities for women business owners seeking advice.

"There are lots of resources, there are lots of online pocket communities that you can search out and get help and get inspiration from," Risner-Wade said.

For Stuart, there are existing businesses out there that can serve as real-world examples. Stuart said she and her husband visited many bookstores before opening Stirling Books & Brew.

Stuart also said she encourages researching both the "good" and "harder" parts of the process, to ensure the experience "meshes well with your personality."

"Is it okay if you go a few months without a paycheck?" Stuart said. "Is it okay if you're the one that the buck stops at?"

'The community gets to know you and trusts you, and so we cannot let that trust ever decline, never.'

In her experience, Merritt said she finds it important never to make a "quick decision," adding that after over 40 years in business, she's still learning.

Ultimately, to anyone with a business idea that sparks a passion, Risner-Wade said her advice is to "go for it."

"Go for it and learn as much as you can."

Bonnie Lord also contributed reporting to this story.

YellowBird Chocolate Shop



Owner of YellowBird Chocolate Shop Jenny Risner-Wade, alumna '98, and her mother, Maryann Spencer, inspect a batch of cooling chocolate. Risner-Wade said Spencer frequently works at the shop, making and selling chocolate with her daughter (Photo by Bonnie Lord).

Women's Basketball Reflects on Their Season; 'We Had Something to Prove'



Portland, Mich., senior Ava Guilford sets herself up for a free throw as East Lansing senior Payton Baker, Muskegon sophomore Khaleeya Cook and Burton junior Anna Honnen stand lined up behind her from left to right. Guilford and Baker were the two seniors honored on Feb. 21 at their senior night game against Adrian College (Photo by Domis Gibson).

Jocelyn Kincaid-Beal
Managing Editor

After Albion's women's basketball team was voted sixth in the MIAA Women's Basketball Coaches Preseason Poll, Muskegon sophomore, shooting guard and co-captain Khaleeya Cook said the team "had something to prove to everybody."

She said the ranking provided "the drive and fire" to get the team going. At the end of the season, Albion finished third in the MIAA tournament.

This was just one of the team's accomplishments of the 2025-26 season.

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Women's Basketball Reflects on Their Season; 'Something to Prove'

Continued from front.

Their record was 19-8, their most wins in a season since 2019-20. For the first time since 2005, the MIAA's two individual postseason awards for women's basketball both went to Albion players. Portland, Michigan, senior, point guard and co-captain Ava Guilford was awarded Defensive Player of the Year, and Houghton junior, small forward and co-captain Meghan Trehwella was awarded Most Valuable Player. They were presented with their awards on Feb. 27 at Trine University after the MIAA tournament semifinals.

"We were really unified this year, and I think that helped with a lot of our success," Cook said. "We all wanted one goal and we all wanted to play to win."

Posting Up Against Assumptions

Women's basketball head coach Doreen Carden, who reached 400 career wins this season, said the team culture this year has been "a huge strength" and is one of the reasons the team "had such success" this season.

"Nobody's really counted us to be a top team this year," Carden said. "We got voted sixth, so for us to finish third, I think a lot of it is because of the strength and the relationships and the team chemistry."

Trehwella said the team's record at the end of the season was "awesome."

"We showed our conference that we were not supposed to be ranked that low," Trehwella said.

Trehwella added that winning games against Hope and Calvin was "a big accomplishment" this season. The team's 60-54 win on Jan. 28 at home against Hope College was their first win against Hope since 2017. Guilford said the win kept the team "pushing."

"It was 99% chance to one of winning," Guilford said. "Being able to do that with the community, with the school, all the students there supporting us – that was a big part of our season."

In addition to the team's culture, another strength, Carden said, was the team's resilience. There were "a lot of games" where Albion was trailing in the final minutes but didn't give in, Carden said.

"We've come back in a lot of games that we might have had no business winning," Carden said. "There was no quit."

'At the end of the day, it was something I did, but they were a part of it.'

According to Trehwella, the Feb. 14 game against Kalamazoo was one of those victories. Albion was down 9 points with 1:34 left on the clock, but came back and won 79-75.

"We won games we weren't supposed to win," Trehwella said. "We always dug deep and won and had each other's backs."

Cook said the team's success this season shows them they can "compete with people."

"We can be way better than we expected, no matter what, as long as we stick together, trust the process, trust the coaches and just play all out. We can really do big things," Cook said.

'Instrumental' Players Earn Recognition

Trehwella said she sees her new title as "a team award," adding that her teammates push her at every practice and are always supportive of her.

"It's my teammates that got me there," Trehwella said. "At the end of the day, it was something I did, but they were a part of it."

Guilford said it was "really meaningful" to her to be named Defensive Player of the Year. When she was being recruited to play at the collegiate level, Guilford said a lot of coaches didn't want her, worrying she couldn't defend because she's 5'1".

Being the MIAA's Defensive Player of the Year around four years later made her "feel good, for sure," she said.

According to Carden, Guilford is "the heart and soul" of the team, and she and Trehwella were "instrumental" in the team's success this year.

For Trehwella, earning her award had extra significance.

"I also got to do it by the side of my best friend Ava," Trehwella said. "To me that's special, and I'm going to always remember this season."

Sisters On and Off the Court

Trehwella said the team culture this year has been "amazing," and they did a lot of team bonding at the beginning of the year to get to know each other better.

"I love everyone on our team; we all get along," Trehwella said. "It's like we're all sisters."

However, it wasn't always this way, according to Guilford. When she joined the team as a first-year, she said the culture was "terrible."

'I love everyone on our team; we all get along. It's like we're all sisters.'

"There was like eight senior captains, they were all power-hungry, nobody really listened to each other and it was definitely very divided," Guilford said. "Being a freshman and being able to observe that, I knew that in my four years that's not how I wanted to leave it."

Guilford and East Lansing senior, power forward and co-captain Payton Baker knew team culture was something they wanted to work on this year, Guilford said.

"We did a lot of team bonding; people probably started to get annoyed by it, but at the end of the day, this was by far my closest team," Guilford said.

For Trehwella, it's "super sad" to see Guilford and Baker, the team's only two seniors, go. Baker welcomed her and was there for her when she joined the team, Trehwella said, and Guilford's been her roommate for two years.

"Both of them are hustlers on the court," Trehwella said. "We're going to hurt without them for sure."

Cook said she thinks the team will be "overlooked" again next year, especially with the seniors graduating – but she's optimistic.



"We're losing two big players, but I think if everybody works hard, trust the coaches, we'll be fine," Cook said.

Houghton junior Meghan Trehwella takes a shot against Adrian on Feb. 21. According to *gobrits.com*, Trehwella scored a record of 506 points through the regular season, making her the first player to score 500 points since the 2017 season (Photo by Domis Gibson).

Opinion: I'm Tired of Hearing 'How Far We've Come' Since the Victorian Era

Sophia Davenport
Volunteer Multimedia Journalist

When I think of the Victorian era, it's apparent how much women's rights and agency have improved since then. Yet, when I dig a little deeper, it's also clear how much further we have to go.

Ashley Miller, associate professor of English and department chair, studies the Victorian era. She teaches multiple classes based on literature written at the time, one of which I'm currently taking: "Gothic Literature."

While taking this course, I've learned about the differences between how Victorian and modern women are treated.

Growing and changing as a woman has been discouraging for me because of navigating the societal expectations of what I should be and what spheres I'm allowed to exist in.



Recycle the Pleiad

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An 1866 photo of a women's society at Albion College. Although they're set apart by over 150 years, modern women still engage in many of the same social battles as their Victorian counterparts (Photo courtesy of Albion College Archives).

We have come far, but looking at the state of media and politics today, I'm left feeling like society wants us to go backwards, to before the Victorian era.

Reproductive Rights

Compared to the 1800s, it's clear how far reproductive care for women has come scientifically; however, in the past, the value of a woman's life over the fetus was not up for debate.

"Throughout most of the 19th century, it was understood that a mother's life was medically more important than a fetus," Miller said. "If a mother's life was in danger, you had to prioritize that over the life of a fetus."

The issue of abortion is a source of hostile discourse in the current political sphere.

In Deepa Shivaram's National Public Radio (NPR) article, she states, "Through the end of the 20th century and the decades since, there's been a concerted effort from Republicans to prioritize abortion restrictions in legislation and judicial appointees."

It's essential to analyze how the world's view on women's rights has changed and whether this change is beneficial to the mental and physical health of women in the long run.

I am angry and disappointed that instead of focusing on my health or well-being, politicians and lawmakers are only interested in policing women's bodies.

It is suffocating to live in a world where conservative politicians and influencers think women are best when we're unheard.

Beauty Standards

It's easy to imagine the ideal of beauty would be easier to obtain today than it was in Victorian times; however, I'd actually argue that it's harder.

In the Victorian period, women were expected to wear corsets and show as little skin as possible, and though these societal expectations seem strict, the modern world has taken it to a new extreme.

"I think that there is something perhaps much scarier and more insidious about today's beauty culture, because so much of it requires literal surgery," Miller said.

The pressure on today's women to stay young and sexually appealing is present all around us, to the point of facing ridicule if these expectations of beauty aren't met.

In Mandy French's 2024 Medical News Today article, she states that "beauty standards in society tell people how they 'should' look."

"With the inundation of media in today's society, there is more pressure for people, especially young females, to look a certain way and have a specific body type," French wrote.

Instead of improving from the past, society has simply learned to expect more from women, even if these expectations border on the impossible.

Women in the Home

Despite the ability to vote and financial independence being considerable accomplishments in the fight for women's rights since the Victorian era, there are still political movements that prefer women to remain strictly domestic figures.

"I think we are seeing a lot of conservative influencers and politicians desire a return to a fantasy of a world where women belong in the home," Miller said.

This movement is harmful for women's rights at large, as it only allows women to exist in a certain sphere and shames us for wanting more for ourselves.

According to Moira Donegan of The Guardian, "The Republican Party's obsession with families has taken a fanatical turn."

"If you're a woman in America, Republicans want you to be a mother whether you care to or not," Donegan wrote.

Known as the "Tradwife" trend, this movement silences women's voices on a worldwide scale, preventing them from moving forward in a setting that isn't strictly the home.

I'm offended by the existence of this movement entirely. For women to be reduced to only being allowed to be mothers or caretakers leaves me thinking this movement wants to erase all the progress the women's rights movement has made.

Moving Forward

The independence women have in America today is unrecognizable compared to the 1800s; however, our work is far from over.

Though women possess greater rights now than they did in the Victorian era, there are still many political and social movements that desire the regression of women's rights instead of progression.

Women should be allowed to exist in society, whether we conform to the social expectations that come with femininity or not.