

## A Review of Historic Sites in Southwest Louisiana

# Women Entrepreneurs

# then NOW

By Cory Conner

One interesting fact of American History is that women were operating their own businesses long before an amendment to the Constitution was ratified giving women the right to vote in 1920. In fact Mary Goddard, who is considered to be one of the first American women business owners, was operating her husband's printing press ten years prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Southwest Louisiana also has a proud history of women entrepreneurs.

In 1931 a group of local businesswomen formed the Lake Charles chapter of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women. The local organization participated in many charitable and civic events such as participating in National Business Women's Week. In the 1930s it campaigned to bring a junior college to the area, later becoming McNeese State University. In July of 1931, members from the local club, who were attending the organization's national convention, presented President

Herbert Hoover a one hundred pound bag of Louisiana Rice to bring attention to the industry.

There are many successful businesses in Southwest Louisiana started by women entrepreneurs. One of those businesses is unique due to the fact that it has been family owned and operated by three generations

of women for thirty years. The story of Bertha's Catering began with Bertha Richard and her passion for cooking. Bertha started learning how to cook at a very young age. "Her dad built her a stool so she was able to reach the stove top," says Murl Frederick, Bertha's daughter.

Bertha's interest in cooking continued throughout her life. Murl inherited her mother's passion and decided to turn their hobby into a business. In 1985, Murl started Bertha's Cakes and Catering. "She (Bertha) knew that her passion for cooking was a gift from God. She shared that gift with all her family, friends, church, and community," Murl said.

Today the business is owned by Bertha's granddaughter (Murl's daughter), Stephanie Grabowski. Stephanie's daughter, Lauren Grabowski, also works in the business making her the family's fourth generation to carry on their passion for cooking and sharing it with others. In addition to offering catering services to local businesses and industries, Bertha's Catering has a full service deli with daily plate lunches.

Our area continues to thrive with many talented businesswomen and entrepreneurs. With many large-scale economic expansion projects underway Southwest Louisiana is a great place for women entrepreneurs to make their mark in history.



**Stephanie Grabowski, Bertha Richard, Murl Frederick.**