

Middle Country Public Library celebrates fall with 23rd annual Women's EXPO

Making up more than two-thirds of Long Island's business community, small businesses are the heartbeat of our economy. In this challenging time, it is more important than ever to shop local and support Long Island entrepreneurs.

FEATURE STORY

The annual Women's EXPO at the Middle Country Public Library, in Centereach on Thursday, October 5 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. is a great opportunity to meet with and shop from some of these local entrepreneurs.

An initiative of the Middle Country Library Foundation, this annual event doesn't just "provide physical space for Long Island Women to sell their products, it goes beyond that," says Alexandra Mallilo, Vice President, Commercial Private Banking, BankUnited, N.A. and EXPO Education Sponsor.

"The entrepreneurs become part of a community of professionals, with access to subject experts on everything from photographing products for virtual sales, to determining appropriate pricing, collecting payment, social media marketing, and brand awareness. These business tools help women turn passion projects into profitable businesses."

Small businesses support and enrich the communities they serve and the chance to meet its members is important. "The Women's EXPO is a wonderful opportunity for the community to meet and hear women entrepreneurs tell their story and promote their businesses," says Maryellen Ferretti, Retail Market Manager, V.P. of TD Bank, the EXPO's raffle sponsor. "It is just part of what makes Middle Country Library a great partner with TD Bank, they create innovative spaces and hold inclusive events where strangers become neighbors—and neighbors, friends."

When you shop locally you often deal directly with people who genuinely care about the quality of goods and customer satisfaction. Whether it's the corner deli, the neighborhood coffee shop, or a woman entrepreneur at the Women's EXPO, every local purchase is a vote of confidence in your community.

Let's shine a spotlight on some of the incredible local entrepreneurs who will be this year's Women's EXPO:



Jeanette Candido

The Granola Plant

After deciding she "didn't want to sit in an office anymore," Jeanette Candido started The Granola Plant five years ago. She started selling her gluten free, oil free and processed sugar free granola at farmers' markets on Long Island and it took off right away. Being an entrepreneur in these trying times is "not easy...but it's still going," says Jeanette. Over time she has increased her offerings, depending on the season and the location, to include hot cocoa mix, homemade marshmallows, and granola in decorative canisters.

Like other small business owners, she is feeling the effects of the economy, although it seems to be getting better. Jeanette is looking forward to her 3rd year at the EXPO. "It's such a fun day seeing those shoppers that visit every year."

When asked if she had advice for other women entrepreneurs, Jeanette said, "Don't compare yourself to anyone else." Words we could all take to heart but for small business owners it is especially important.

Lori Ledek

Lorie's Originals

Driving on Middle Country Road in Calverton, you might notice an interesting shop connected to J&R's Steakhouse. Opened in 2012, Lori's Originals features the beautiful, hand painted glassware and gifts of Lori Ledek. To round out the store, Lori sources items from local artisans to "curate a homemade & handmade look in the store." This enables her to support local artists and put their wares in front of new shoppers.

Shoppers love it; they appreciate the affordability as Lori tries to keep prices as reasonable as possible. In these economic times, "it's a dance to make things affordable," she says, but one she is willing to do for her community.

With a retail location, Lori is doing only a couple of shows each year. She is part of the EXPO year after year "because of the people. I love the support you give to small business owners."

Visit Lori at the EXPO or at her store (4364 Middle Country Road, Calverton) to see her beautiful hand painted designs and for a chance to meet her store mascot, cocker spaniel Bosco.



Ashley Settle

Sweet Legends Bakeshop

Originally from Las Vegas, Ashley Settle started Sweet Legends Bakeshop a little over a year ago. After working at a bakery in college, and loving its atmosphere she says, "I have always loved baking," so starting a home bakery seemed like a perfect fit. Beautiful, decorated cookies are the cornerstone of Ashley's business with many customers exclaiming, "OMG they are too beautiful to eat." Ashley assures us they taste as delicious as they look!

Being a new business in a new area, Ashley began attending workshops and events at the Middle Country Public Library's Miller Business Center and "found it so helpful." There she not only increased her business skills, she also met other business professionals including local business owner Bertha Portalatin of Painting with a Twist in Selden. This connection has led to Ashley and Bertha partnering to offer cookie decorating classes.

At the Miller Business Center, Ashley also learned about the Women's EXPO. She heard from several women how great it was to be a part of a local event celebrating women entrepreneurs. Ashley is excited for the event and the chance to really meet the community.

As a new business owner, Ashley's advice is to cover all your legal bases from the beginning. Once you've done that "just start," she says.

The 23rd annual Women's EXPO will take place on Thursday, October 5 at the Middle Country Public Library, 101 Eastwood Blvd, Centereach from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Snacks and lunch will be available for purchase in the EXPO Cafe. Need a break from shopping? Take a rest in the Zen Den on site. Admission is free and there is ample parking. For further information, call the library at 631-585-9393 x296 or visit www.womensEXPOli.org.