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BUFFALO NIAGARA CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS

Spring 2026



NAWBO
BUFFALO NIAGARA
National Association of Women Business Owners

Immediate Past President's Address



Stephanie Kennedy

Supporting Women In Business Through Connection & Knowledge

How NAWBO Buffalo-Niagara helps to bridge the gap for women in business.

NAWBO Buffalo-Niagara is at the forefront of supporting women in business across Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Rochester, creating a strong regional network where entrepreneurs can access education, mentorship, advocacy, and meaningful connections that help them grow, lead, and thrive at every stage of their careers.

With hearts as big as their passion for their businesses, the women in NAWBO Buffalo-Niagara are always looking for ways to support each other. Whether it's advising each other or connecting one another with other business owners, lifting each other up is what we are all about.

Women in business, particularly small businesses, run into many challenges. We recognize this and that's why our programming is based on so many of these topics.

Here are some challenges that women in business face in NYS:

1. Limited access to funding and capital

Women entrepreneurs in New York are significantly less likely to secure traditional financing and investment.

- Only 10% of women entrepreneurs rely on banks for capital vs. ~20% of men
- Women receive far less equity funding and often rely on debt or personal networks
- Access to financing remains one of the most common barriers to starting and scaling businesses

2. Revenue and profitability gaps

Women-owned businesses in New York earn substantially less than those owned by men.

- 44% of women entrepreneurs report their business is not profitable (vs 32% of men)
- Average annual sales of women-owned businesses are roughly half those of male-owned firms
- Women-run firms generate only 13% of private business revenue despite a large representation

3. Pay gap and economic inequality

Even when businesses succeed, women still earn less overall.

- Women in New York still earn less than men and the gap widened after the pandemic

Through these challenges, we remain passionate about lifting women in business up through programming, advocacy efforts, connecting each other with the proper resources, and more.

Women in business, especially small business owners, often carry multiple roles at once. They navigate funding hurdles, growth decisions, hiring pressures, and the emotional weight of leadership while balancing family, community, and personal responsibilities. We understand that entrepreneurship can feel isolating at times, and that behind every business milestone is a human being doing their best to figure it out as they go.

That understanding shapes everything we do.

Our programming is intentionally designed around the real challenges women face each day. From financial confidence and strategic growth to leadership development, marketing, and work-life integration, our Dinner Meetings and other events create space not only for learning but for honest conversations and shared experiences. We aim to equip women with practical tools while also reminding them they are not alone in the journey.

At its core, NAWBO Buffalo-Niagara is more than a professional organization. It is a place to be seen, heard, and supported. A place where ambition is encouraged, vulnerability is welcomed, and every member is empowered to rise while bringing others with her.

We welcome anyone who would like to learn more about our mission to contact info@nawbowny.org for more information.

With gratitude & love,

Stephanie Kennedy

President, NAWBO Buffalo-Niagara

Stephanie Kennedy is the owner of Reach Digital Media Solutions, LLC

NAWBO MEMBERS!

Be sure to bring your marketing materials to our monthly meetings to share at our Membership table.

The Power of the Right Room: Women, Leadership, and Belonging Across Borders



Sophie Bautista

Wrapping up my first full week back in Buffalo, I found myself reflecting not just on the events I attended, but on what they represented—personally and professionally.

Reconnecting with the community through NAWBO reminded me of something I didn't always have growing up: a space where women genuinely uplift one another. From the coffee networking session thoughtfully

led by Stephanie Saline, to the powerful word cloud exercise during the dinner hosted by Sheri L. Scavone, and even the intimate nightcap facilitated by Patti Mancabelli—each moment felt intentional. Not just networking, but connection. Not just presence, but belonging.

And for me, that distinction matters deeply.

I grew up in the Philippines, a country rich in resilience, talent, and strong family values—but still, in many ways, shaped by a patriarchal structure. It's a place where women are capable of leading, building, and thriving, yet are often expected to do so quietly. Where being a “strong woman” is admired—but being a powerful one can still be questioned.

I was fortunate to grow up in an environment where I didn't feel the need to apologize for my ambition. But even then, there were moments—subtle and not so subtle—where being assertive, decisive, or visionary as a woman was met with resistance or discomfort.

And so, navigating leadership as a woman has always come with an awareness: not of limitation, but of perception.

That's why being part of spaces like NAWBO feels different. Here, strength is not something to tone down—it's something to stand in. Women celebrate each other's wins, speak each other's names in rooms of opportunity, and create environments where leadership doesn't need to be softened to be accepted.

This past week reminded me of the kind of community I want to continue building—and bringing with me.

Because as I move between Buffalo and the Philippines, I don't just see two places. I see an opportunity.

An opportunity to bridge cultures.

To create spaces where women don't have to choose between being respected and being powerful.

To build communities where collaboration replaces competition.

In many ways, it brings me back to a childhood dream—sitting in the four corners of my mom's university lecture room, imagining myself as someone who could move between worlds, connect people, and create something meaningful across borders.

Maybe that dream never really left.

And maybe, in small ways, it's already unfolding.

Sophie Bautista-Sales is the Managing Partner of WE R Solutions

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People Results: The HerHR Solutions Difference



Alyssa Klimuszka

HerHR Solutions, LLC is a modern human resources consulting firm owned by Alyssa Klimuszka, SHRM-CP dedicated to helping businesses navigate the complexities of people management with confidence and clarity. Based in Buffalo, New York, and serving clients nationwide, HerHR Solutions specializes in fractional HR support and customized HR

consulting designed to meet organizations where they are—whether they are building HR functions from the ground up or enhancing existing processes.

At its core, HerHR Solutions understands that strong businesses are built on strong people practices. Many small to mid-sized organizations either lack a dedicated HR department or need additional expertise without the commitment of a full-time hire. That's where fractional HR support becomes a powerful solution. By offering flexible, scalable services, HerHR Solutions provides clients with expert guidance in areas such as employee relations, compliance, policy development, performance management, and organizational strategy.

What sets HerHR Solutions apart is its personalized and relationship-driven approach. Rather than applying one-size-fits-all solutions, the firm takes the time to understand each client's culture, goals, and challenges. This allows for tailored strategies that not only solve immediate issues but also support long-term growth and sustainability. Clients gain a trusted partner who is invested in their success and equipped to adapt as their business evolves.

In addition to ongoing HR support, HerHR Solutions offers consulting services for specific projects and initiatives. Whether a company is navigating change, refining its employee experience, or ensuring compliance with ever-changing regulations, the firm brings both expertise and a practical, hands-on perspective.

With a professional yet approachable style, HerHR Solutions makes HR accessible, strategic, and impactful. By bridging the gap between people and performance, the firm empowers organizations across the country to build stronger teams, reduce risk, and create workplaces where both businesses and employees can thrive.

Alyssa Klimuszka, SHRM-CP, is the owner of HerHR Solutions, LLC

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Before Problems Grow



Lisa A. Coppola, Esq.

As business owners, we make decisions all day long. Some are exciting. Some are strategic. Many are made in the middle of a busy day, while we're juggling responsibilities, solving problems, and trying to keep everything moving forward.

Most business problems don't arrive looking urgent at first. They usually begin as something small: an agreement that should've been clearer, an employee issue no one wants to address, a client misunderstanding, or a decision that gets

pushed off because there simply isn't enough time.

I've seen again and again that small issues often become much harder, and more expensive, when they're left alone too long. What could've been handled with one difficult but thoughtful conversation, one revision to a contract, or one clear boundary can turn into conflict, distraction, lost time, or real financial strain.

One of the best things a business owner can do is address issues early. That doesn't mean assuming the worst or reacting out of fear. It means paying attention, asking good questions, documenting important decisions, and getting the right support before a problem grows.

In real life, that can mean using a clear contract, setting expectations with clients and team members, keeping solid records, or having basic

policies and procedures in place before you're scrambling to create them under pressure. It also can mean having a candid conversation sooner rather than later, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Many women business owners are especially good at carrying a lot. We're resourceful, resilient, and used to figuring things out. Those qualities serve us well. But they also can make it easy to wait too long before reaching out for help. Sometimes we tell ourselves we can handle it later, smooth it over, or deal with it when things calm down. Usually, sooner's better.

For me, protecting a business isn't about being guarded. It's about being intentional. It's about building something strong, thoughtful, and prepared for growth.

That's also one reason NAWBO matters. Being in community with other women business owners reminds us that we don't have to build alone. Shared experience, trusted relationships, and smart perspectives aren't just encouraging, they're part of building well.

The businesses that last aren't the ones that avoid every problem. They're the ones led by women willing to address small issues before they become big ones.

Lisa A. Coppola, Esq. is the Founder and Managing Partner of The Coppola Firm

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BIG IDEAS START OVER COFFEE.

Join us for our next

Coffee & Conversation

networking event!



When: Thursday, August 6, 10:00-11:00 a.m.
Where: HANSA Workspace
Cost: Free and open to the public
Please note that your advance registration is requested

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Jennifer Vitagliano
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Join the Party Crew!



After our monthly dinner meetings at Chef's, the Crew heads out to local establishments for continued conversations and making deeper connections. Pictured from left: Dr. Natasha Buxbaum, Deuterium Imaging LLC; Sherrie Barr Mack, The Mack Barr Group; Heather Jackson-Fassari, Interlink CFO; Janna Willoughby-Lohr, Papercraft Miracles; Paula D'Amico, Paula D'Amico Productions; Patti Mancabelli, Her Corporate Counsel; Alyssa Klimuszka, HerHR Solutions, LLC; Sophie Bautista-Sales, We R Solutions; Stephanie Kennedy, Reach Digital Media Solutions

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