

Women's Month

2009

*“Creating opportunities for development
through
women's economic empowerment.”*



March, 2009
BELIZE

**MESSAGE IN COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S
DAY AND THE OPENING OF WOMEN'S MONTH
2009**

**BY MINISTER PETER EDEN MARTINEZ
MINISTER OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT &
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**



Globally, March 8 is observed as International Women's Day, a day to celebrate the achievements of women in the world and to inspire them to continue their fight for gender equality and women's rights.

Traditionally, Belize has commemorated International Women's Day not only on March 8 but throughout that week. Over the years, International women's Day in Belize has increased in status. More non-governmental and community-based organizations have joined in organizing and executing activities focusing on women's advancement and women's rights. Consequently, this year instead of limiting International Women's Day activities to a mere seven days, the entire month of March will be used to highlight and celebrate the positive contributions of Belizean women.

Women's Month will be celebrated under the theme: "*Creating opportunities for development through women's economic empowerment.*" This theme is one that speaks to my

government's commitment to give greater opportunities for women's employment and job creation. Throughout Belize we often see women working longer hours than men, usually for less pay. Many women spend much of the day performing tasks to maintain their households. Many toil the land in order to have sustenance to feed their families. But still, unpaid domestic work continues to be unconsidered, unreported, and unvalued.

In our country's efforts to achieve Millennium Development Goal 3, *promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women*, we must recognize the link between gender inequality and poverty. Women's financial insecurities and dependencies often influence their choices in terms in education, sexual and reproductive health and relationships. In fact, one of the main reasons cited by women in Belize who choose to remain in abusive relationships is one of a financial nature.

In our first year of administration, my government through the Women's Department in the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, has commenced the Supporting Single Mothers in Belize City Project. This project has provided seventy single mothers with the opportunity to receive four months of skills training in one of four disciplines and to consequently be placed in gainful employment. Too often, single mothers have to sacrifice the comfort and safety of their children for her venturing off to work in order to earn wages to care for her family. The participants of this program have been able to embrace and absorb the information provided to them with the comfort of knowing that

while they are in the classroom receiving training, their children are being cared for by professional care providers. This project will provide more opportunities to women to transform work into income.

Women's economic empowerment can transcend the patterns of traditional behaviours to which some women feel bound and which promote dependency and subservience. According to the International Conference on Population and Development " *As women are generally the poorest of the poor, eliminating social, cultural, political and economic discrimination against women is a prerequisite of eradicating poverty in the context of sustainable development.*"

The Government of Belize remains committed to continue to create opportunities for development through women's economic empowerment. We continue to dialogue with our international partners and explore possibilities for more projects and programmes aimed at women's entrepreneurship development, non-traditional skills training and women's access to micro-finance.

May God continue to bestow His richest blessings upon the women of Belize.

Have a Happy Women's Month!

International Women's Day

International Women's Day (March 8th) is an occasion marked by women's groups around the world. Putting women and women's right on the global agenda is the moving force behind this day. It is the story of ordinary women as makers of history; it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men.

The tradition of celebrating International Women's Day represents at least nine decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development. The idea of a day for women, celebrated all over the world, began in America and Europe. The focus was the movement for women's rights and achieving universal suffrage for women. Between 1913 and 1917 women held rallies either to protest the war or to express solidarity with their sisters.

The International Women's Day protest that changed the world occurred in Russia in 1917 (March 8th by Western Reckoning, February 23 on the Georgian calendar). Coming on the rise of long struggle and many strikes, International

Women's Day 1917 inspired thousands of Russian women to leave their homes and factories to protest the terrible shortages of food, the high prices, the world war, and the increased suffering they had bitterly endured. The protest inspired the last push of a revolution. A general strike spread through Petrograd, and within a week, Czar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate. After 1917, and in honor of women's role in the Russian Revolution, International Women's Day secured its place on March 8th on socialist calendars.

The date became official in 1921, when Bulgarian women attending the International Women's Secretariat of the Communist International made a motion that the day be uniformly celebrated around the world on March 8th.

In the early days of its observance, International Women's Day was celebrated as a socialist holiday honoring working women. With the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s came a renewed interest in International Women's Day. Feminists found it a ready made holiday for the celebration of women's lives and work and began promoting March 8th as such.

In Belize, the first International Women's Day was observed in the late 1970s and was initiated by a strong group of women from various organizations. Since those early years, International Women's Day has assumed a new dimension

for women in Belize. The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by four global United Nations conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand women's rights and participation in the political and economic process. Increasingly in Belize International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate the acts of courage and determination by ordinary Belizean women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of women's rights.



***International
Women's Day***

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

ONGOING THROUGHOUT THE MONTH OF MARCH

- BFLA Pap Smear Campaign-\$25 (*Orange Walk and Dangriga*)
- Exhibition of Belize Women Authors at the Leo Bradley Library- National Library Service and Haven House (*Belize City*)
- Women In Art Exhibition – NICH (March 11 – 26) at the Mexican Institute (*Belize City*)
- Benny's Charitable Donation to YWCA and Haven House

MARCH 2

- Dedication to Belizean and Caribbean Women- St. Catherine's Academy (*March 2 – March 6, 2009, Belize City*)
- “*The Belizean Woman's contribution to Belize's Development*” - University of Belize (Education Campus), 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 pm (*Belize City*)

MARCH 5

- Satellite Table on Women's Rights- Women's Department & Women at Work, 9:00 a.m. San Ignacio Hotel (*San Ignacio*)

MARCH 6

- Street Beat, Women's Department/ Belize Red Cross, 2:00 p.m. (*Belize City*)
- Women's Health Forum on Breast and Cervical Cancer, Women's Department, 5:30 p.m. (*Belize City*)

- World Day of Prayer Worship Service, 7:00 p.m., Holy Redeemer Cathedral (*Belize City*)
- “THE MANY SIDES OF MYRNA MANZANARES- A WOMAN WITH PURPOSE,” 8 p.m., Bliss Center (*Belize City*)

March 7

- “Dalla Day” at Red Creek Check Point ,Women's Department, Mary Open Doors & Women At Work Support Group (*Red Creek, Cayo*)

MARCH 8 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

(National Day of Prayer for Women, Countrywide)

- St. Peters Anglican Church Service, 8:00 a.m. (*Orange Walk*)
- Sacred Heart Church Service, 8:30 a.m. (*San Ignacio*)
- Epworth Methodist Church Service, 9:00 a.m. (*Dangriga*)
- St. Francis Xavier Church Service, 9:00 a.m. (*Corozal*)
- International Women's Day Panel Discussion and Dinner at the Natural Essence Health and Culture Center- T.W.I.N, 11:00 a.m. (*Punta Gorda*)
- Ecumenical Church Service, Youth Enhancement Services 3:00 p.m. (*Belize Elementary School Auditorium, Belize City*).
- International Women's Day Awards Ceremony and Concert at Central Park - T.W.I.N, 4:00 p.m. (*Punta Gorda*)
- St. Peter Clavier Church Service, 7:00 p.m. (*Punta Gorda Town*)

MARCH 11

- Free Eye Examination for Women- BCVI, 8-12 p.m. & 1-3p.m., Belize City Eye Clinic – KMH Compound (*Belize City*)

MARCH 12

- “THE VAGINA SPEAKS OUT” -BFLA, 7:00p.m at Bliss Centre for the Performing Arts, Tickets: \$10 (*Belize City*)

MARCH 13

- YWCA Youth Forum, 8:30 a.m. (*Belize City*)
- Poetry Symposium for Secondary School Female Poets- University of Belize (*Belmopan*)

MARCH 14

- Women's Department Bike Rally 6:00 a.m. commencing at Western Highway/Western Avenue (*Belize City*)
- YWCA Post Bike Rally Breakfast, 6:00 – 9:00 a.m. YWCA Headquarters, (*Belize City*)
- Self Defense Training for Women -Women's Department, 9:00 a.m - 12:00 noon, Mary Open Doors Compound (*San Ignacio*)
- First Annual Basket Festival, a local basket making competition - Building People, 8:00a.m. – 11 a.m., Central Park (*Punta Gorda*)

MARCH 15

- YWCA 'Y' Week Church Service 4:00 p.m., YWCA Headquarters (*Belize City*)

MARCH 16

- Women's Legal Rights Training for Hattieville Women's Group- Women's Department, 6:00 - 8:00 pm. (*Hattieville*)

MARCH 17

- Young Women's Summit at Corozal Community College - Women's Department, 8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. (*Corozal*)
- YWCA Annual General Meeting, 6:00 p.m., YWCA Headquarters (*Belize City*)

MARCH 18

- 4th Annual Women's Summit- Women's Department, 8:30 a.m- 4:00 p.m. Radisson Hotel (*Belize City*)

MARCH 19

- Kolbe Female Inmates Cosmetology Makeover- YWCA, 9:00 a.m. (*Hattieville*)
- “*Meet the Author: Felicia Hernandez*” at National Heritage Library, 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 am, (*Belmopan*)
- Generation Exchange- Women’s Month Planning Committee, 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Black Orchid Resort (*Burrell Boom Village*)

MARCH 20

- Women’s Rights Teachers Workshop at Corozal Community College- Women’s Department, 9:00a.m.- 3:00 p.m. (*Corozal*)
- Women’s Rights Workshop- Women’s Department, Trial Farm Village, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (*Orange Walk*)
- Jewellery Making/Recycling Craft Training at Youth Hostel, Women’s Support Group, 9:00 – 12:00 p.m. (*Mile 22 Western Highway*)

MARCH 21

- Women’s Department Bike Rally, 6:00 a.m., Governor General’s Field (*Belmopan*)
- Paraiso Village Mini Health Fair, Paraiso Women’s Group/ Women’s Department, 9:00 - 3:00 p.m. (*Corozal*)
- YWCA Open House and Sports Day at YWCA Headquarters 9:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. (*Belize City*)

MARCH 23

- San Victor Village Mini Health Fair, San Victor Women’s Group/ Women’s Department, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. (*Corozal*)
- Women’s Rights Sessions – Women’s Department , San Roman Village, 9:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. (*Orange Walk*)
- Small Business Training- Women’s Department, 1:00 p.m. (*Maskall Village*)

MARCH 25

- Young Women's Summit at Escuela Mexico School, 8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. (*Corozal*)
- Women's Rights Workshop at Belmopan Civic Center - Women's Department, 1:15 p.m. - 3:15 p.m. (*Belmopan*)

MARCH 26

- Women's Entrepreneurship Workshop- Women's Department, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (*Corozal*)
- “Hard Times: Women Speak Out” at Lake Independence Community Centre (*or alternate venue*)– Women's Circle, 5:30 p.m. (*Belize City*)
- Sexual Harassment Training at St. John's Junior College - Women's Department, 11:00 a.m.- 1:00 pm. (*Belize City*)

MARCH 27

- Professional Women's Economic Forum- University of Belize (*Belize City*)
- Social Evening for Women at Teul Billiards - Women's Department, 6:00 p.m. (*Punta Gorda*)
- Women's Night Out at Banquitas House of Culture- Women's Department, 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. (*Orange Walk*)
- ‘Women in Art’ Showcase Featuring a Performance by Dr. Billy Jean Young - NICH, 7:30 p.m., Bliss Centre for the Performing Arts (*Belize City*)
- Women's Night Out at the Teachers' Lounge - Women's Department, 9:00 p.m. – 12:00 p.m. (*Dangriga*)

MARCH 28

- Women's Department Bike Rally starting at Central Park, 6:00 a.m. (*Corozal*)
- Women's Department Bike Rally starting at El Establo, 6:00 a.m. (*Orange Walk*)

- Women's Department Bike Rally starting at Monument Site, 6:00 a.m. (*Dangriga*)
- Women's Department Bike Rally starting at Joe Taylor Creek Bridge, 6:00 a.m. (*Punta Gorda*)
- Women's Cook- Off at La Chancha -Women's Department, 9:00 a.m., (*Benque Viejo del Carmen*)
- Women's Department Mini Health Fair at Central Park, 9:00 a.m.- 3:00p.m. (*Corozal*)
- Women's Groups Expo at Queen Victoria Park- Women's Department, 9:00 a.m.– 3:00 p.m. (*Orange Walk*)
- Women's Rights Training for Uprising Women of Mahogany Heights (Mahogany Heights Community Centre)- Women's Department, 2:00 pm. -4:00 pm. (*Mahogany Heights*)
- Tea Party and Craft Display by Stay-at-home Moms- Haven House, 4:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m., Central Assembly of God Headquarters (*Belize City*)

MARCH 31

- 4th Annual Women's Awards Ceremony- Women's Department, 7:00 p.m. Bliss Center for the Performing Arts (*Belize City*)

Outstanding Women

The Women's Department invited agencies to honour women **chosen by their respective organizations** to be acknowledged for the outstanding contributions they have made to the organization or to the community on a whole. It is because of these women and the many others like them that we celebrate this Month. These women will be honoured at the 4th Annual Women's Awards Ceremony on March 31st, 2009 at the Bliss Center for Performing Arts at 7:00 p.m.



**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE
DEFENSE FORCE:
*Ava Marie Sutherland***

She's the Personal Assistant to the Commander of the Belize Defence Force (B.D.F.) for the past 5 ½ years. However, you may know

Ava Marie Sutherland, best when she wore her military dress; make that blouse and skirt. A soldier who worked inside the force's headquarters for some 22 years, her performance has been aptly described as exemplary. Today, the force is benefitting from her office management skills; most of which she acquired on her own. Her attention to detail, coupled with her analytical skills place her well above her peers.

As a retired Warrant Officer (the highest rank for an enlisted soldier) she displayed a high standard of discipline and expects no less from her co-workers. Apart from her regular job, Sutherland is active in her community; treasurer of the Maxboro Assemblies of God and a member of the community's council. Her aptitude and attitude are the reasons she's imminently qualified and deserving of this commendation.



**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE
POLICE DEPARTMENT:**

Supt. Dezerie Jacklyn Phillips

From a woman in battle green to a woman in khaki. Dezerie Jacklyn Phillips is a superintendent of police who has given outstanding service to the Belize Police Department, her community and country. In a male-dominated profession she has swam often against the tide in order to fulfill her numerous duties. The department has equipped her to face the challenge head-on as she's attended several supervisory and leadership courses both at home and abroad.

In June 2006, in her capacity as Commander of the Tourism Policing Unit she made regional presentations on tourism security. Today Supt. Phillips commands the Benque Viejo Police Sub-Formation.

She has received a host of awards for her distinguished service including Commissioner's of Police Commendation for Outstanding Performance, Commissioner of Police Financial reward for 1997, Officer of the Year 2004 and Long Standing Service and Good Conduct in 2004.

The Belize Police Department takes pride in honouring Supt. Phillips as an outstanding woman.



**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE
ASSOCIATION OF PRINCIPALS OF
SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
*Brenda Armstrong***

A mother, career educator, historian and lay preacher—that's a slice of Brenda J. Armstrong's life. Born in Belize City, she acquired her early education at Wesley Primary school, St. Catherine Academy and St. John's Junior College. Her path lead her to Viterbo University in Wisconsin, U.S.A. where she received a BA in History and Education (Hons.) She later pursued a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of Florida.

Armstrong has and continues to mold many of Belize's young minds. She started out at one of her alma maters, St. Catherine Academy, where she remained for 17 years, having headed the Department of Social Science and being vice-principal of the all girls high school. She became principal of the oldest secondary institution, Wesley College and restored the academic excellence the school was known for in its hay day. In 2003 she became the Dean of Wesley Junior College, a position she only relinquished in 2007 to become the president of that same institution.

She has served as Belize's representative to the Caribbean Examinations Council, President of the Belize Association of Principals of Secondary Schools (BAPSS) and President of the Caribbean Association of Principals of Secondary Schools (CAPSS). Despite her many responsibilities, she makes time to mother her two children, Herschel and Bea Jay.



**SUBMITTED BY NATIONAL COUNCIL
ON AGEING:**

Gweneth Gillett

Many Belizeans who attended St. Hilda's College, today the Anglican Cathedral College, may remember her as their former teacher, or even a young comedienne who paired with the late George McKesey on the *Gwen & Georgie* Show aired on the now defunct Radio Belize in the 1940s and 50s. But there's more to Gweneth Gillett than this small piece can ever say.

She's served her community and church with distinction having been the Organizing Secretary of the Mother's Union for the Anglican Diocese for over two decades, today she co-ordinates the St. Mary's School Feeding Programme and will not miss that Friday commitments unless sick or otherwise engaged with church activities as she's a Lay Minister at St. Mary's Anglican Church. Gillett is the co-host of the Golden Years radio programme which airs on Love FM every other Sunday evening. As Secretary of the Belize Council of Churches, a board member of the Sister Cecilia Home for the Elderly and a member of the planning committee for the Women's World Day of Prayer, she still finds time to serve as Commissioner of the Supreme Court.

The little spare time she has remaining she spends with her husband Norman, her three sons, one daughter and five grandchildren. Gardening also occupies a relaxing place in her heart.

Gweneth Gillett is an active member of the National Council on Ageing since its inception in 2003 and this organisation sees it fit to honour her with an Outstanding Woman of the Year Award.



SUBMITTED BY BELIZE DIABETES ASSOCIATION:

Hon. Barbara Johnston J.P.Sr.

Meet Barbara Christina Johnston, a senior Justice of the Peace who in her 42-years as a career public office rose to become Budget Director.

Today her voluntary work includes treasurer of the Belize Diabetes Association, president of the Civil Service Credit Union Ltd., and cosmetology and cookery teacher.

She has reached out to many diabetics particularly in Belmopan where she singlehandedly arranged and got assistance for public testing-in schools, churches, offices and also in private homes, all in the name of providing service. No one in need of testing or advice on Diabetes is ever turned away.

Ms. B.J., as she's affectionately known, enjoys making crafts, wines and cakes. She also does a bit of farming and beekeeping. The Belize Diabetes Association is proud to present Barbara Christina Johnston J.P. (Sr.) as its remarkable woman for the outstanding award.



SUBMITTED BY YOUTH ENHANCEMENT SERVICES:

Tomasa Ortiz de Smith

Tomasa Ortiz de Smith is not a born Belizean but that doesn't stop her from being an inspiration to the many Belizean women and girls she has served. Born in neighbouring Central America, Roatan, Honduras, she was schooled for the most part in this fair city.

Her work dates back to the days of the Breast is Best League where she was a Breast Feeding counselor. She was also a member of The Belize Organisation for Women and Development

(BOWAND). Ortiz de Smith has travelled extensively and gained great experiences she uses today as a teacher at the Youth Enhancement Services (YES), an alternative education programme for girls who find themselves in difficult circumstances. She is also a former member of the YES Outreach and Advocacy Committee who has also lend her time to the Centre for Teenaged Mothers.



**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE COUNCIL
FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED:**

Joan M. Musa

Caring, devoted, visionary are just a few words that come to mind when you hear the name Joan Musa. She has dedicated the past 28 years to the people of Belize. Since 1981, the Belize Council for the Visually Impaired (B.C.V.I.) has been under her wings and has expanded throughout the country helping people who are blind and preventing others from losing their vision. Whether it's her clients, staff or just someone asking for help, Musa is always willing to grant it, wholeheartedly and without expectations. If not for her vision and compassion for people with disabilities, hundreds of Belizeans would not have the opportunity at a fulfilling life. The clients and staff of B.C.V.I. thank Joan Musa for her devotion and for being such an inspiration.



**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE FAMILY
LIFE ASSOCIATION:**

Nurse Sharmella Kelly

Nurse Sharmella Kelly entered the nursing profession in 1988; twenty-one years on there's no other work she'd rather be doing. As a trained Rural Health Nurse she has cared for the sick and comforted the

sad in the deep south and the city. In 1995 she was transferred to the island township of San Pedro where she still serves today.

By virtue of being a nurse service comes naturally to Kelly. That selfless service is seen in the time she dedicates to the San Pedro HIV Committee where she sits as a member. Her commitment to the health and development of her community is the driving force behind her ensuring the delivery of client-focused, quality health services including sexual and reproductive health services. The latter she provides through partnership with the Belize Family Life Association. (B.F.L.A.)

Her professionalism, honesty and loyalty are unmatched and make her one of the preferred service providers in San Pedro. She's not only a devoted professional but a devoted mother of three daughters.

B.F.L.A. congratulates Nurse Sharmella Kelly- A nurse's nurse!



**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE NATIONAL
TEACHERS UNION:
*Elena Cofius Smith***

Unionism is a language in itself and activist Elena Smith is fluent. And how could she not be? After all she's been modeling the language for 14 years. This trained teacher by profession who can be found in the classroom of St. Ignatius School has been a union officer for 14 consecutive years: six as the Secretary of the Belize Branch and eight as its President. She's also been the Assistant Secretary of the Belize National Teacher's Union, a member of the Council of Management of the National Trade Union Congress of Belize and one of its general secretaries. She is also serving her second term as a Director on the Social Security Board and was elected to serve as Deputy Chairman during her first term.

Smith who is well versed in her union craft has passed on her skills to several teachers all over the country via workshops. When she is not on the picket lines advocating for wages or better working conditions for her teachers, she can be found advocating for both the Anglican Cathedral College and Faith Pre-school P.T.A.s. When Smith is not serving men and women she's serving God as a Baptism Instructor at her parish, St. Martin de Porres.

For commitment over and beyond the call of duty the B.N.T.U. awards Elena Smith.



**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE
NATIONAL TEACHERS UNION:
*Dorla E. Stuart***

The B.N.T.U. also saw it fit to reward former union activist and Methodist School teacher of 42 years Dorla E. Stuart.

It all began over 30 years ago, in 1977, when Stuart first wet her feet in the movement as an executive member of the union serving as trustee for several terms. Ten years on she was elected treasurer at the B.N.T.U.'s Belize Branch Annual General Meeting. Stuart recalled the enriching experiences she gained by working with six different branch presidents. She also had what she termed as the "honour and privilege" of representing the union in Barbados for a week-long seminar in 1996.

The B.N.T.U. awards Dorla Stuart for 17 years of unionism.





SUBMITTED BY PUBLIC SERVICE UNION:

Jacqueline Willoughby Sanchez

Jacqueline Willoughby-Sanchez has served in as a Public Officer for the past two decades in the Public Service at the Immigration Department and the Director of Public Prosecutions office in the Attorney General's Ministry as a Prosecutor. She's perhaps best known as the President of the Public Service Union where she's been a member for 20 years. Throughout her life she has been community-spirited working with different charitable organisations as well as serving on Youth Groups under the auspices of the now defunct Pride Belize, church groups as well as trade unions. She has a passion for fairness and justice. As a Christian woman, she finds her purpose for serving others, especially disadvantaged youth through life skills presentations. Sanchez says she operates by the motto *Preach the gospel, just don't use words*



SUBMITTED BY YWCA:

Merva Theus

Merva Ellen O'Brien Theus is an educator who can truly say "*I care so I teach*". After retiring, she realised she still had more to give and started teaching in the H.E.L.P. Programme of the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.) Belize, where she teaches primary education and remedial subjects. Her invaluable assistance is given to children from all walks of life and from several primary schools in the city. Theus came up through the pupil teacher system and has since taught in both the Methodist and Anglican Managements.

She's a known "Y" volunteer since 1991 and Board member with responsibility for youth and sports. She's the driving force behind the "Ys" annual summer programme.

Around the "Y" she's earned a name for herself- "ever faithful, ever sure" as she can be relied upon at all times. Honest, humble and hardworking are only a few words which immediately come to mind when talking about Theus.

She's an exceptional mother and grandmother to seven lovely grandchildren.

The Y.W.C.A. thanks this special woman for all the volunteer hours she's put into the "Y" to ensure sure that the Y.W.C.A. continues to change lives while changing communities.



**SUBMITTED BY NATIONAL
COMMITTEE FOR FAMILIES
AND CHILDREN:**

Judith Alpuche

All that you need to know about Judith Marie Alpuche can be found in her favorite quote by Pablo Casals who urges us that *We must all work to make the world worthy of its children.* Undoubtedly Alpuche has worked in various capacities to make Belize worthy of its children. In 1991 she graduated from St. John's College Junior College where she earned her Associates Degree in Economics and History. Later she attended the St. Louis University where she earned her Bachelor's of Arts in Political Science in 1993 and her Masters of Social Work in 1999.

Teacher, advocate, implementer, coordinator, social worker, activist and counselor are only some of the many hats that she has worn in her short lifetime. She began her career as a Social Studies teacher at the Belmopan Comprehensive School. From 1994 to 2001 she worked at the Department of Human Services as a Child Services Officer and later as their Counsellor. In those capacities

she coordinated the national foster care and adoption programmes, investigated referrals of child abuse and neglect, reported to the Family Court on child protective matters and provided clinical supervision on family services matters. Understanding the urgent need for more social workers in the field she served as a Social Work Lecturer at the University of Belize where she contributed to developing policies for the Social Work Department and engaged in research activities relevant to the field of social work.

In 2001 she became the Executive Director of the National Committee for Families and Children (N.C.F.C.) The interest and commitment she displayed throughout her tenure was pivotal in moving the agenda of the N.C.F.C. forward. Her capable leadership led to many accomplishments--the development of the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents 2004-2015 and the passage of Amendments to the Families and Children Act (FACA). In 2007 she moved to UNICEF where she worked as their Programme Officer for Early Childhood Development and Education. Alpuche has contributed to the development of policies affecting children and helped to raise public awareness and education on family and children's issues. Her work ethics and professional reputation for diligence has led her to her present post of Chief Executive Officer for the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation. Again, as she has done throughout her career, she continues to champion the well being of our families.

What really distinguishes Judith is that she embodies the entire human and children's rights practices that she advocates for. She passionately believes in the work that she does and has lived her life in pursuit of securing these rights for all the children of Belize. While others use their abilities to further themselves she has strategically chosen to serve in capacities that allow her to make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate and the most vulnerable. Her blind devotion and dedication to protecting the best interest of children and the families they live in should not go unnoticed. As we celebrate outstanding and remarkable women the National Committee for Families and Children sincerely applauds Judith Alpuche.



**SUBMITTED BY NATIONAL DRUG
ABUSE CONTROL COUNCIL:**
Elizabeth Goff

Elizabeth Goff is the school counsellor at Wesley College, her alma mater since she returned to Belize in 1992. She's passionate about working with young people and enjoys interacting with them. Her work has significantly impacted and arrested the drop-out rate at that institution. But her dream of becoming a counselor didn't happen overnight.

Thanks to Etta Whiteman, her Child Development Lecturer at Excelsior School, in Jamaica where she was born. Whiteman inspired her and Goff accomplished her goal through doing graduate work at Teacher's College, Columbia University, in New York City.

This young globetrotter received her early education at the Methodist School in Dangriga, where her Belizean father, the late Rev'd. Charles Goff was the Methodist Minister. She holds a BA in Latin American Studies from U.W.I., a MA and MEd. both in Psychological Counselling, from Columbia University, NYC. She has been a Member of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) since 1992 and attends their annual Conference regularly.

The preacher's daughter, never lost sight of her Methodist roots as she worships at Ebenezer Methodist Church, in the city, where she also serves as a class leader and usher. Her hobbies are reading, singing and travelling





**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE TOURISM
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION:**

Maria Vega



Maria Vega has been a driving force guiding the growth of the tourism industry since 1985.

This former President of the Belize Tourism Association (B.T.I.A.) is seen by the association as an unsung ambassador for Belizean tourism having represented the country at countless conferences and meetings locally, regionally and internationally.

As an officer of B.T.I.A. her responsibilities were varied including the presidency of FEDECATUR, Organisation Mundo Maya representation, World Heritage Sub-committee and the only private sector appointee to the Belize UNESCO National Commission 2006-2008.

She laid the groundwork for the country's major travel feature promotion magazine, *Destination Belize*, a solid income earner for B.T.I.A. over the past 15 years. This feature showcased the best of Belize to some 90 million viewers when it premiered on Latin TV, UNIVISION. She also advocated for a portion of the hotel tax to industry training and was instrumental in preparing the Belize Tourism Diagnostic for the IDB which resulted in the Blackstone Report and the \$33 million IDB loan now being mobilised.

Born in Caye Caulker, Vega holds a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from Viterbo University and a MSc. in Tourism Marketing, University of Surrey, UK.





**SUBMITTED BY BELIZE CITY
COUNCIL:
*Zenaida Moya***

Belize City's first woman Mayor, Zenaida Moya, (elected March 2006) first came to national prominence as a virtual unknown in 2005 amid massive union protest against the then government.

She began her career at the Belize Social Security Board in October 1995 and later moved to the Ministry of Economic Development in May 1997 as an economist and later senior economist. There she analysed, co-ordinated and developed strategies on national development planning initiatives, projects, and programmes in various sectors, while representing the Ministry and Government of Belize at numerous meetings and conferences, locally and internationally.

In 2002, Moya became Registrar of Co-operatives and Credit Unions, where she managed and headed the Department while supervising, regulating and monitoring cooperatives' and credit unions' performance to ensure safety and soundness of members' and investors' funds. She was later voted President of the Caribbean Association of Regulators of Co-operatives. She worked in the Ministry of Finance for a stint and was transferred to National Development as Director of Public Sector Investment Programme.

She's the first vice-president of the Caribbean Association of Local Government Authorities and vice-president of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. Moya, a former member of the National Trade Union Congress of Belize, attained her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Business

Administration with a concentration in Economics from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington and University of Detroit Mercy in Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.



**SUBMITTED BY Women's
Department (Corozal):**
Amira Leiva

Much of her formative years were spent picking plums to sell in order to provide for her family. Amira Elia Leiva comes from humble beginnings in Corozal but has dedicated her life to touch the lives of others.

Her passion for helping others led her to the teaching profession. She attended the Belize Teacher's College and received a certificate from the University of the West Indies. To further her education, she also attended the College of Preceptors in London and the University College of Belize. Leiva began teaching at St. Francis Xavier Primary in 1968 where she taught all possible levels and moved on to Kiddy Kinder Government Pre-School where she is the principal. She has been serving as an educator for the past 42 years and was instrumental in establishing a free Pre-school programme for underprivileged children in Corozal.

While teaching has taken up a lot of her time, she has not forgotten the community which nurtured her into becoming the strong, independent woman she is today. Amira Leiva serves her community diligently and has President of Pre-school Association, the Adult Therapy Support Group and the Neighbourhood Watch Committee in Corozal. Her community work has extended to working with the Corozal Regional Council, Al-anon, the Drug Council and the Civic & Police Committee.





**SUBMITTED BY Women's Department
(Orange Walk): *Nelita Sambula Doherty***

Think Nelita Sambula Doherty. Have you thought about a poet, mother, volunteer, community activist? Well Doherty, a native Dangrigan who grew up in Orange Walk Town is all that and more. She has penned four books: *Journey On, Aba Wama, Guarinagu's Exile Gregsy's Adventures in Crooked Tree*. Putting oil on canvas is also her favorite hobby along with exploring different cultures- vignettes she captures for her writings.

Doherty knows how to hone her skills as she's also a basket and hammock weaver, pottery and doll maker who also do beading. She offers teaching services gratis to anyone who wants to learn these specialised skills.

She's a former member of W.O.M.E.N – *Women On the Move for Equal Needs*, which assists single mothers in educating their children. She was also a foster mother, with the Ministry of Human Development and past president of the Garifuna Council in Orange Walk Town.

She dreams of one day having a refuge for children: an outlet away from home and school, to keep them busy.





**SUBMITTED BY Women's
Department (Belize District):
*Gertrude Velasquez***

Many women in Belize die before their 75th birthday but for Gertrude Velasquez a native of Burrell Boom Village in the Belize Rural North, she's still serving

her community as a Community Nurses' Aide.

But life for Velasquez hasn't always been rosy. She was given a teaching stint at her primary school, Burrell Boom Methodist, but that was short-lived.

She got married and the union produced nine children. She became an instant entrepreneur selling Kriol bread and bun, stew cashew and cashew seed. She even 'took in' washing and ironing while working at Williamson Industries back in the day, she literally did what any good mother would do to make ends meet.

She got a wake up call at age 50, when her two grandchildren became seriously ill. That was when she decided to become a Community Nurses' Aide. Her studies paid off and Velasquez re-invented herself.

Velasquez's passion for children, women's health and the love of community knows no bounds. Today in her twilight years she keeps the health fires burning by reaching out to villagers who need sexual and reproductive health services.





**SUBMITTED BY Women's Department
(Cayo): *Anna Silva***

Anna Silva is a woman filled with self-motivation and drive. She left the busy city of Belize and relocated to the tranquil rolling hills of the Cayo District. She has never shied away from continued education and skills training; she has done several certificate courses in basic counselling, home-care services, child discipline, nutrition, arts, sewing, cake decorating and cabinet-making.

Her volunteer work includes spending time with the elderly at the Octavia Waight Centre and humanitarian causes at Cornerstone Foundation. It was her hard work, dedication and willingness to give of herself that later landed her a paying job at Cornerstone Foundation. In her capacity as Administrator of the Foundation, Anna developed an even greater appreciation for the disadvantaged and extended the Foundation's work to women, youth, the elderly, the disabled and persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Her desire to always want to do more for her community led her to develop programmes that would benefit the people of the Cayo District. These include a feeding programme for children, women's support groups, Youth on the Move Youth Group and a national programme called *Caring for Children* which is still operational today.

She spent countless hours listening and caring for those who came to her for any form of assistance. Her most recent endeavour is *Mary Open Doors*, an NGO which was created to assist battered women and their children.

Working with people is a passion and comes naturally to Anna Silva who believes that people are born with certain passions; passions that drive their work. Silva's passion is giving to those less fortunate as she continues to give God the glory for what she is able to give back to others.



**SUBMITTED BY Women's
Department (Stann Creek):
*Nurse Jacqueline Nembhard***

Inspiration for many of us comes in many forms, at different ages and from the most unusual of places. For Nurse Jacqueline Bracket Nembhard it came to her at the tender age of 10 and she saw it in the eyes of patients who were improperly treated by the attending nurse in a hospital. She was visiting with her mom and never liked what she saw. Determined to turn pain into pleasure she decided to become a nurse.

She got that wish after she graduated from high school and entered the Bliss School of Nursing (now U.B.) She has worked as a nurse at the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital, Belmopan Public Health Department and the Southern Regional Hospital. However, her best loved assignment was working as a Rural Health Nurse in Seine Bight Village, Stann Creek District for five years. "I enjoyed working with especially the elders in Seine Bight doing home visits...They got the best of me and when I left, it was one of the saddest moments of my life." Nembhard is considered a warm woman. Over the years, she's opened the door of her heart and home to close to two dozen children that have benefited from her self sacrificing patient, loving care.

If caring were enough everyone would be a nurse! Nembhard knows that all too well. She's now a student in the Associates Degree programme at Ecumenical Junior College in Dangriga. She's also hoping that after graduation it will not end there as she wants to obtain her Bachelor's Degree in Nursing.





**SUBMITTED BY Women's Department
(Toledo):**

Florence Marjorie Pennell Johnson

Business woman Florence Johnson, 59, was born in Belize's southernmost town, Punta Gorda where she still lives today with her family. She owns and operates the famous Johnson's Store on Main Street in that municipality.

When she's not in the store she's busy organising activities for her alumni association, Claver College. She is also a founder and teacher at the Claver College Extension. A devout Methodist, Johnson is actively involved in the lay ministry of her church, Punta Gorda Methodist as a lay preacher. She's also serves the Women's Group as its secretary.

She's married to John Authur Johnson and together they have three daughters and one granddaughter. She loves reading, playing Scrabble, dancing, travelling, meeting people and doing positive things. Florence Johnson attended St. Peter Claver Primary School and St. John's Jr. College where she graduated with an Associate Degree in Arts & Science.

Outstanding Organization



The Women's Department is pleased to recognize Mary Open Doors as an outstanding organization.

Mary Open Doors is an example of the evolution of a community-based women's group into a women's NGO serving not only the women in their district but women from throughout the country. In an effort to address the severe problem of the lack of resources of both safety and protection, specifically when women were brutalized and needed help and protection outside their homes, this group of women left no stones unturned in their quest for success. Their fervor was temporarily extinguished several years ago when the group became dormant, but like a Phoenix from the flame, the group resurrected.

Members continued to work with battered women and their children in their community and found themselves filling the gap by housing them in their homes. While the group initially felt the need to offer educational training programs to women, their focus changed to establishing a Safe House for battered women in the Cayo District. These women did not have trust funds or bank accounts with large sums of money, but they had big hearts and an endless passion to serve the women of their community. The founding members, some of whom were domestic violence survivors themselves, started soliciting resources and of course utilizing a lot of their own personal resources to get the shelter started. After months of frustration, desolation and perseverance, Mary Open Doors was opened in February of 2008. Mary Open Doors is now a registered NGO: humanitarian organization established to inspire respect for self culture and the environment. Since then they have established an office that offers basic counseling, education on rights, court advocacy, referrals, case

management and follow-up. The Shelter can accommodate five families and residents benefit from 24 hours security, basic needs (food, clothing etc) counseling, skills training and job placement when available. Mary Open Doors has also opened a thrift store which generates income to sustain the overhead cost of running the shelter. Along with the Women's Department, Mary Open Doors facilitates a support group for women in Cayo. To date, Mary Open Doors has opened its doors to many women from across Belize. It is an agency where women can turn to and get the support and empowerment they need to change their situation.

Outstanding Women's Group

The Women's Department is pleased to recognize Maya Centre Women's Group as an Outstanding Women's Group.



Ich ix Chu'upil yan ti müc" Women united have strength"

The little women's group that could

Eleven years ago, a group of enterprising Maya women found a dark traditional Maya house to ply their trade, nine years later and with a loan from the EU in hand, the unattractive place of business has been transformed into a spacious concrete centre.

But there's more to this group of Mopan Maya woman who operate under the banner of the Maya Centre Women's Group than meets the eye. They can be found, along the roadside in Maya Centre Village. Take the Southern Highway, that's if you care enough to enjoy the beauty of the hinterlands and you'll encounter the ladies along the roadside.

These women are by no means your typical ladies in a women's group. For starters, they have organisation down to a science. Imagine, two decades ago, they numbered a mere 15 today they almost quadrupled that number. They are 50 strong and range in age from 15 years old to 80. These women have taken their ingenuity and skill and literally put it on display in beautiful and unique typical Maya jewellery, art and craft like slate carvings, baskets, calabash and clothing. For these women it's not just about making and spending money, it's about cultural preservation and longevity. They work voluntarily on a shift system to keep up with the demand for their goods and at the end of the day 10% of the sales remains in the group's coffers in order that the women have funds to support community activities like sports at the village primary school while the remaining 90 % belongs to the artisan's family to plan for a better quality of life, e.g. educating the children.

Did I say the women of The Maya Centre Women's Group are enterprising? You can purchase your entrance ticket for the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary from the group, that's an additional 10% for the group courtesy of the Belize Audubon Society.

Committed to growth and development, the Maya Centre group didn't just enlarge their original Maya house; they constructed a large concrete centre to open a restaurant in the near future. A great way to entice hungry travelers to take back a little piece of a talented group that first settled in our native Belize. The Maya; make that Mopan Maya.

Working Together

In Belize, many Government and non-government organizations are working together to improve the lives of Belizeans.

BELIZE FAMILY LIFE ASSOCIATION (BFLA)

BFLA is a member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation which offers family life education and organized family planning. Through the dissemination of information on family planning, BFLA assists Belizean women and men in making healthy, well informed decisions about their sexual reproductive health.

CONTACT: 203-1018

FAMILY COURT

The Family Court was established in 1898 to keep pace with the ever growing social and legal needs of the family. It plays a vital role in keeping society together. It is responsible for the administration of justices for family and juvenile justice matters. The Family Court has dealt with thousands of cases over the years ranging from domestic violence, legal separation, custody, maintenance and juvenile offenders.

CONTACT: 227-4107/ 227-4114

HAVEN HOUSE

Haven House is currently the only safe house for female survivors of domestic violence and their children in the Belize District. Opened in 1993, the shelter provides temporary housing for up to 21 days, counseling and legal advocacy for residents.

CONTACT: 222-4947

MARY OPEN DOORS

Mary Open Doors is a shelter for battered women and their children. It is located in the Cayo District. It officially opened in 2008, but had functioned informally prior to that. The Mary Open Door office provides basic counseling, skills training and job placement for its clients.

CONTACT: 626-5780

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

National Committee for Families and Children is a statutory body that is set up to oversee Belize's compliance with its international, regional and national commitments to children and their families.

CONTACT: 223-0059

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMISSION (NWC)

The National Women's Commission was established in 1982. Over the years, the commission has been instrumental in creating and supporting a wide variety of programs for women. The National Women's Commission has conducted in-depth research regarding women's issues in Belize and has published several major documents including the National Gender Policy and Women in Politics.

CONTACT: 223-7592

PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION (PAHO)

PAHO was established in 1902 and is the world's oldest public health organization. It serves as the regional office of the World Health Organization and works with all the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of their peoples. PAHO is dedicated to working with governments of the Americas primarily, Ministry of Health, in addressing public health issues such as Gender-based Violence.

CONTACT: 224-4885

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)

UNICEF is an international organization dedicated to meeting the needs of women and children around the world. It places emphasis on health, education, social services, legislation and outreach programs aimed to enhance the national development of Belize.

CONTACT: 223-3609

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA)

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

CONTACT: 223-1644

WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT, MINISTRY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Women's Department continues to be one of the leading organizations in Belize dedicated to improving the lives of women. Since 1978, the Women's Department has worked to empower women through a wide range of progressive initiatives including training classes for women, the promotion of public education in the schools, facilitating support groups and organizing community events to raise awareness about Domestic Violence and women's issues.

CONTACT: Belize City, 227-3888/ 227-7397

Email: womensdept@btl.net

Corozal: 402-2120, Orange Walk: 302-2058, Cayo: 804-2098,
Dangriga: 502-0038, Toledo: 702-2021

WOMEN'S ISSUES NETWORK OF BELIZE (WIN)

WIN-Belize was officially launched during Women's Week in 1993. The organization was established with the realization that there was a need for organizations to combine their human and financial resources for greater efficiency and effectiveness. WIN-Belize works to coordinate resources and activities of many local women's groups.

CONTACT: 227-1069

YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YWCA)

The Belize YWCA opened in 1956 and has consistently provided a wide variety of services and programs to women of all ages. The facility currently offers a long list of programs including the Helping Early Leavers Program, a daycare, ESL classes, aerobics and community education classes.

CONTACT: 203-4971

YOUTH ENHANCEMENT SERVICES (YES)

Youth Enhancement Services is a non-government organization that provides training, support and education to teenage girls. YES was founded in 1989 by the National Children's Home in London and Barbados.

CONTACT: 225-2315

The Women's Department would like to thank its partner agencies, civil society, the business community, international agencies, our volunteers and the general public for the support that continues to be given to the multi-sectoral effort to put women at the forefront of our agenda.

Have a Wonderful
Women's month 2009!



Special thanks to Ann- Marie Williams and Print Belize for their assistance in the publication of this booklet.

