

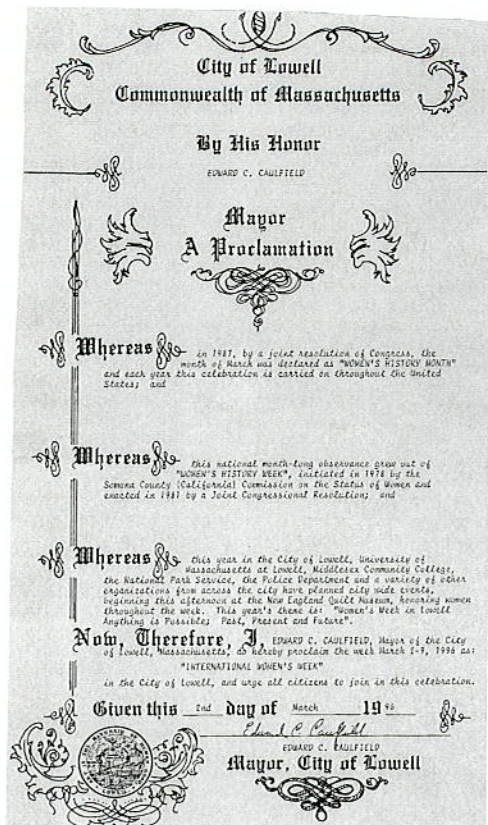


Graphic: Michelle Verfaille

Lowell Women's Week

The Story Behind the Success

Community Archive by Jamie Weller, Graduate Student
Community Social Psychology, December 2005



... This year in the City of Lowell, University of Massachusetts at Lowell, Middlesex Community College, the National Park Service, the Police Department and a variety of other organizations from across the city have planned city wide events, beginning this afternoon at the New England Quilt Museum, honoring women throughout the week.

The plan for the first year of Lowell Women's Week was for each sponsoring organization to have events in their own settings during the week of International Women's Day, and they would all be publicized together on one calendar. During the first official Lowell Women's Week, 17 organizations were represented on the planning committee, and 18 events were offered to the public, free-of-charge, throughout the city.

Pre-history

At the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell)

There was a group of faculty, staff, and students from different departments and groups with a common interest in doing programs and extracurricular events on women's issues. The Women's Studies Steering Committee organized meetings with other groups on campus to discuss possible programs. A shared concern among them was stopping violence against women. The first program they planned was held on International Women's Day (March 8) in 1993 for half a day in the heavily-trafficked McGauvran Student Union Center. The theme for the event was stopping violence against women, and the intent was to take the learning and awareness out of the classroom and into a more public space. Representatives from community organizations that provided services for women and girls were invited to campus to inform the university community of their services. The 2nd Annual International Women's Day program was two days long and focused on the successes and achievements of women and girls. For this program, as was the case the previous year, representatives from organizations in the Lowell community were very willing to come to campus and increase the awareness of their services.

In the City of Lowell

Programs celebrating International Women's Day (March 8) and National Women's History Month (March) were offered in the city for many years. The Lowell National Historical Park had been organizing public programs to celebrate National Women's History Month for the city of Lowell. People at the New England Quilt Museum, Middlesex Community College, and others were also doing their own events and programs. Middlesex Community College (MCC) became involved in the UMass Lowell campus program in the second or third year, largely because of Carol McCall Bond, then a recent graduate of UMass Lowell and a staff member at MCC. Carol was integral in pulling in others from MCC.



Bringing Everyone Together

The 3rd Annual International Women's Day program at UMass Lowell was a resource fair, which brought twenty or more community organizations to the campus to share their resources with the university community. Some of the groups with representatives at the fair included the International Student Club from Middlesex Community College, Lowell General Hospital, the Lowell National Historical Park, Alternative House, and Rape Crisis Services of Greater Lowell. It appeared that the representatives from the community organizations enjoyed networking with each other and learning more about the services they provided. Although the program had continued to grow and brought more groups to the University's campus each year, there were also other events going on in the community. How could all of the International Women's Day events happening throughout Lowell be linked?

Audrey Ambrosino and Maria Cole (then Papesh) at the Lowell National Historical Park contacted Anne Mulvey at UMass Lowell (then coordinator of Women's Studies) and suggested combining all of the events that take place for International Women's Day into a week-long celebration in the city of Lowell. The group, along with Carol McCall Bond at Middlesex Community College and others, decided to centralize the publicity of all the events into one calendar, and they each would share and distribute them in their organizations. The group had no sense of how long this would last, but it seemed like a great way to get the programs publicized more broadly. Thus, the Planning Committee was formed and a city-wide collaboration had begun.



The Planning Committee

The planning committee is an informal group of volunteers that is open to all community members. The planning committee a fluid and welcoming network of women who live, work, and attend school in Lowell and the surrounding area. It is not incorporated and

has no designated officers or board. There is a core group of women who have been part of the planning committee since the first LWW, and many others have joined later and participated for shorter periods of time. The planning committee meets once per month from September to March. Organizations are part of the planning committee when staff members or affiliates attend one or more planning meetings and are interested in having their organization listed on the program brochure and related publicity. In addition to organizations that have representatives on the planning committee, there are some organizations that do not have a member serving on the planning committee but who organize, host or fund events. These organizations, called sponsors, also play an important role in developing and supporting the LWW program.

Number of Organizations on the Planning Committee, 1996-2005

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
17	30	20	19	16	22	29	33	26	28

Taken table from: Mulvey, A. (2005, March 15). *Lowell Women's Week: A community gem*. Invited lecture, Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

The Evolution of the Planning Committee

During the first LWW, the planning committee consisted of women from 17 organizations. That number has grown over the years, and more than 70 organizations have been represented on the committee during the first decade of LWW. The planning committee initiates and runs some events, while others are developed and sponsored by one or more organizations. Five organizations—Community Teamwork Inc., Girls Inc. of Greater Lowell, the Lowell National Historical Park, Middlesex Community College, and the University of Massachusetts Lowell—have had staff on the planning committee all ten years.

In the first years of LWW and more recently, the planning committee considered applying for non-profit status, but ultimately decided not to. Most members felt it would require too much work, and that having an informal group was better. In 2001, there was concern that the planning committee was becoming too large to collectively do all the planning. The idea of forming sub-committees was discussed, and the group decided the formation of such sub-committees would help sustain the organization. They also thought they would reduce the time needed for the regular meetings, delegate some of the responsibilities, and facilitate work in between the regular meetings. Currently, there are seven LWW committees: Administration (Transition Team); Because of Her; Communications; Opening Breakfast; Program Content; Public Art; and Publicity-Brochure.

Transitioning

In the last year, the planning committee has been going through a period of transition due to one of the founding women, Audrey Ambrosino, leaving the Lowell area. Audrey had been part of the planning committee since the very beginning, and did a large amount of the organizational work. She, like all other members of the planning committee, did not have a formal role with specific tasks, but there were a lot of things that she did every year. When she left, the core members of the committee realized that because the LWW program had grown so much over the last decade, the informal structure was not allowing the planning committee to monitor and coordinate all the details about the program.

A leadership group, called the Transition Team, has been created to help the organization restructure and be able to communicate more clearly how new members can be involved and what the expectations are. The transition team consists of five women, some of whom have been part of the planning committee since the beginning. They facilitate the planning committee meetings, record the minutes, prepare the agendas, and provide the refreshments. The one person who does not have a specific role that month is what they call a “floater” who is there in case someone cannot make it to the meeting. The hope is that after the next Lowell Women’s Week (March 2006) a permanent leadership group will be formed. Ideally, it will consist of two or three members of this year’s transition team, along with new members who would like to take on those roles.

Student Involvement

College, high school, and grade school students are welcomed on the planning committee, but due to their time constraints, many are involved for only one year. The larger planning committee supports them in planning programs or events, connecting them with people in the community with resources they might find useful, and generally creating a space where they can share their thoughts and be heard. Some roles for students have included: serving on the planning committee; evaluating events; doing publicity and outreach on campuses and in the community; raising money and donating products to local women’s organizations; presenting their own work; organizing resource fairs; organizing events and serving as presenters and facilitators; running public art workshops; and attending and hosting events.

“Spanner Events”

“Spanner Events” is a term used by the Planning Committee for events that are created by the group as a whole. Below are some of the current and former spanner events of Lowell Women’s Week. Several of the spanner events are planned annually by a designated sub-committee.



Opening Breakfast

The first opening breakfast was suggested in the second year of LWW by Anne Marie Martin, a staff member at Community Teamwork, Incorporated. The opening breakfast has continued every year since. She thought it would be a great way to get publicity, provide an opportunity for networking, and a way to celebrate the opening of the week. The first breakfast sold out at 100 tickets, and the opening breakfast has continued to attract a diverse group of women from sponsoring organizations, as well as children and friends. The breakfast now draws over 200 people and has a waiting list. It includes an award ceremony, an opportunity to participate in a public art project, door prizes, museum exhibits, and speeches from city and state officials.



LWW Public Art Project

Hundreds of women and girls have participated in the Public Art Projects. These projects give women and girls an opportunity for self-expression, and make women's lives prominently visible in the city. From professional art work to kindergarten creations, public art work has been displayed in the windows of downtown businesses and in other exhibit places during Lowell Women's Week. A new theme is developed every year, along with guidelines. The first Public Art Project took place in 2000, and has become an annual project. Some themes have included "2,000 Wishes of Women," "Shoes: Stepping into an Uncertain World," "Food: 'Bake it 'til it's Done'," "With These Hands...", and "We All Wear Many Hats." The theme for 2006 is "Our Common Wealth: Changing the State of Women's Power."



Because of Her Awards

The annual *Because of Her* awards recognize local women who have exhibited extraordinary leadership, commitment and courage, and have significantly changed the lives of others through kindness, generosity, compassion and activism. The award is intended for women whose contributions have not been publicly recognized. They are given to women and teens for long-term or emerging leadership in their communities. The first *Because of Her* award was given in 2001 at the opening breakfast, and has continued every year since. Three annual awards are made: one to a woman with a lifetime of service in her community; one to a woman who has been working in her community for a large part of her life; and one to an "emerging leader" in her community, usually a teen.



Girls with Goals Conference

Girls Inc. of Greater Lowell began an annual conference the same year as the first Lowell Women's Week. It was a collaborative effort by a number of youth programs in Lowell designed for girls called "Capture Your Confidence" that fosters media literacy, leadership, confidence, and self-esteem. Kathy Horn, the program director at Girls Inc. and a member of the LWW planning committee, asked that the conference be co-sponsored by LWW. Since its second year in 1997, the conference has been held on the last Saturday of the week and co-sponsored by LWW.



UMass Lowell V-Day UNTIL THE VIOLENCE STOPS

V-Day is a global movement to stop violence against women and girls. The V-Day College Campaign invites college students across the world to produce annual productions of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* to raise awareness and money for the anti-violence groups in their local communities. In 2002, UMass Lowell faculty, staff, and students organized a V-Day College Campaign with a performance of *The Vagina Monologues* to benefit Alternative House and RAWA: the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. In 2003, the second V-Day College Campaign took place, and raised money for the Canadian and First Nation's Women's Fund, Alternative House, and Rape Crisis Services of Greater Lowell. The last V-Day College Campaign took place at UMass Lowell in 2004 and raised money for local groups as well as for anti-violence initiatives in Juarez, Mexico. Projects from all three Campaigns were displayed and became part of Lowell Women's Week.

LWW Events and Programs

The number of events has grown from 18 in the first year to a high of 40 in 2003. To date, a total of more than 270 events have been offered during Lowell Women's Week. Events and programs are offered in five content areas: diversity; arts and culture; contemporary social issues; networking; and history.

Number of Events/Programs by Year and Content Category* 1996-2005

Year Number	Diversity Number	Art/Culture Number	Social Issues Number	Networking Number	History Number
1996 18	8	2	7	5	6
1997 18	9	4	8	3	6
1998 25	8	9	11	8	4
1999 19	5	7	10	6	2
2000 20	7	8	8	4	3
2001 28	8	8	11	8	6
2002 39	17	20	7	13	3
2003 40	18	22	7	13	7
2004 28	15	11	9	11	1
2005 38	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

Total 273	95	91	78	71	38
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Table from: Mulvey, A. (delete year). *Lowell Women's Week, 1996-2005: A Community Gem and a Gem of a Community*

Note: Yearly content totals exceed total number of events/programs per year since some events/programs fit into more than one content category.

*A few events/programs (3) were coded as *other* since they did not fit into any of the categories

The Voices of Women – expand so it's clear women are from LWW... Insert LWW before women or...???

As noted at the beginning of this archive, the story of Lowell Women's Week is powerful, moving, inspiring, and motivates into action. No one can tell the story better than the women who are involved in writing it. The words of the planning committee can help bring the story to life.

The quotes that follow were obtained from oral history interviews conducted by students in Susan Thomson's Cultural Anthropology class at Middlesex Community College. The students interviewed these women to help them share their stories and tell others what Lowell Women's Week means to them.

"We always wanted to create a program where women and girls who were in a lot of different places in their lives in terms of their jobs, their issues, their school issues, their social status, where we would all try to communicate."

Anne Mulvey, one of the founders of LWW, interviewed by Katie Cavanaugh & Sally Navis

"I have seen the power of women and how they can get wonderful things done."

Dorothy O'Connell, interviewed by Jariatu Thulla, Doreen Barker, Miriam Colon

"It's very empowering to feel like your voice is heard."

Sheri Denk, one of the founders of LWW, interviewed by Karen Rexford & Kristina Colon

"I think from what I've learned I really learned how active a group of women together can make something happen that benefits such a large group of people."

Cynthia Lynch, interviewed by Dawn Tomei & Jonas

"Women's Week shows that women can be organized with no budget and no conflict."

Osvalda Rodriguez, interviewed by Margarida Bernardo & Andrew Santos

"Anything that can transform a community or get people together to think about a topic is powerful."

Darcy Orellana, interviewed by Amanda Siebert & Krystina Camacho

"It is satisfactory, spiritual, and now part of my life. I call it serving the community."

Cecilia Okafor, interviewed by Mukiibi Eva, Thu Tran, & Lucy Kihuri

"When you can, in fact, help an individual or make their lives a little easier, I think that's probably the greatest thing you can achieve."

Maria Cunha, interviewed by Kimberly Boutin & Matt McCarron

"I have a real thing about derivative work so I am constantly pushing my students to find their own voice."

Maxine Farkas, interviewed by Melanie Mendonca & Brianna Lewis

Timeline



1996 Anything Is Possible: Women's Past, Present & Future

Dedicated to a vision of our city and our world as a place free from family violence

1997 Women in the Commonwealth: Diversity is Our Strength

Dedicated to the memory of Yvonne Dunkley

- 1st annual opening breakfast
- 1st annual *Girls with Goals* Conference

1998 Cultivating Community: Diverse Paths & Common Goals

- 1st Women's Week Folk Music Concert
- Donations collected for Alternative House and SuitAbility

1999 Exploring Our Possibilities: Personal, Professional, and Political

- Leslea Newman, author of *Heather Has Two Mommies*, *Homophobia, Family Values & Censorship*

2000 Women in the New Millennium: Looking Back, Moving Forward

Dedicated with thanks to Carol Bond

- 1st Public Art Project, "2,000 Wishes of Women" (annual project)

2001 Every Woman Makes A Difference: Together We Change the World

- 1st "Because of Her..." awards (every year)
- 1st "Celebrating Ourselves as We Age" Croning Ceremony (annual event)
- Public Art Project: "Because of Her..."

2002 Women Across Cultures: Surviving & Thriving in an Uncertain World

- *Because of Her* award dedicated to the memory of Mary Bacigalupo
- 1st UMass Lowell V-Day College Campaign: student performance of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* raises money for programs focused on ending violence against women
- Public Art Project echoes 9/11 realities: "Shoes: Stepping into an Uncertain World"

2003 Nourishing Our Spirit, Inspiring Our Dreams

- Girls' Inc., *Photo Voice* Exhibit
- Public Art Project: "Food: 'bake it 'til it's done'"

2004 Creating a Just World: Voices, Choices and Connections

- *Because of Her* award dedicated to the memory of Susan Leggat
- Public Art Project: "With These Hands..."

2005 Hats Off to a Decade of Promoting Women's Safety, Prosperity & Spirit

Dedicated with thanks to Audrey Ambrosino

- Public Art Project: "We All Wear Many Hats"

2006 Our Common Wealth: Changing the State of Women's Power

- Public Art Project: "Power Tools"

From *Lowell Women's Week 1996-2005: A Decade of Promoting Women's Safety, Prosperity and Spirit* by Anne Mulvey, 2005

Pictures

Lowell Women's Week 1996



Some Founding Planning Committee Members



Lowell Women's Week 2000



Some planning committee members



Some of the 2000 Wishes for Women displayed in Downtown Lowell



Angkor Dance Troupe performing at UMass Lowell

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Anne Mulvey (Professor of Psychology, UMass Lowell) for taking the time to talk with me, share her history of Lowell Women's Week, and provide me with many resources that helped me understand the story that is the success of LWW.

I would also like to thank Susan Thomson (Middlesex Community College and the UMass Lowell Center for Women & work) and the students in her Cultural Anthropology class for the transcripts of their interviews with LWW planning committee members and their wonderfully creative posters honoring those women.



Resources

Material for this archive was obtained from the following documents and websites:

- Lowell Women's Week program brochures
- Lowell Women's Week Planning Committee Meeting Minutes—August 24, 2005 and September 27, 2005

- *Lowell Women's Week: A community gem.* (Invited lecture, Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University, by Anne Mulvey, March 15, 2005)
- *Lowell Women's Week, 1996-2001: Creating Public Space for Women's Lives and Cultures* (presentation by Anne Mulvey, Audrey Ambrosino, and Irene Egan at a UMass Lowell CITA Conference)
- *Lowell Women's Week, 1996-2004: Bridging Campuses and Community* (poster session by Anne Mulvey presented at the 112th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association at Honolulu, Hawaii, July 2004)
- *Lowell Women's Week, 1996-2005: A Community Gem and a Gem of a Community* (unpublished manuscript by Anne Mulvey)
- *Lowell Women's Week 1996-2005: A Decade of Promoting Women's Safety, Prosperity and Spirit* (text and history by Anne Mulvey)
- Lowell Women's Week website: <http://www.lowellwomensweek.org/>
- Girls Inc. of Greater Lowell website: <http://www.girlsinclowell.org/>
- V-Day website: <http://www.vday.org/main.html>
- V-Day community archive by Erin Sheehan, December 2003; available at: <http://www.uml.edu/centers/CFWC/programs/Archive.htm#vday>

WANT TO GET INVOLVED OR LEARN MORE ABOUT LWW?

If you would like to learn more about the Lowell Women's Week Planning Committee or how to organize or sponsor an event, contact Sheri Denk at 978-656-3159 [denks@middlesex.mass.edu] or call Kathy Horn at Girls, Inc., at 978-458-6529. For more information about Lowell Women's Week events and annual program, visit the LWW website (insert address here....)



Behind every community organization, leader, program, or event, there is a story. Sometimes the stories are exciting. Sometimes they are boring and uneventful. And sometimes, they are *powerful, moving, inspiring, and motivate us into action.*

This is the story of Lowell Women's Week.

Lowell Women's Week (LWW)

is a yearly celebration of the lives of women and girls in this city. Organized by an all-volunteer planning committee, with events sponsored by many of the City's agencies and organizations, Lowell Women's Week highlights the work, struggles, hopes and achievements of Lowell's women and girls (Excerpt from brochure, "Lowell Women's Week 1996-2005: A Decade of Promoting Women's Safety, Prosperity and Spirit," 2005¹).

It's Official!

The first city-wide Lowell Women's Week was officially proclaimed by the mayor of Lowell, Edward C. Caulfield, on **March 2, 1996.**

¹ All sources of material used to create this archive are listed at the end of the document.