

Discover some unknown feats of local women during the 14th annual

## Women's History Month Celebration Brunch

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Their accomplishments are many and far-reaching; changing the Roswell landscape forever. But chances are their names are not as readily recognizable to those who often benefit from their contributions to the community.

Propelling their names from the shadows to the limelight, the 14th annual Women's History Month Celebration Brunch will honor Kaarina Jager, Barbara Corn Patterson and Andrea Hill Smith. Set to take place at the Roswell Museum and Art Center Saturday, March 23, from 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., the brunch typically honors women in the community who have made extraordinary contributions, making Roswell a better place to live in.

This year's brunch will honor the woman behind Roswell's United Blood Services, a woman CPA whose significant business transactions have had great impact on Roswell and a woman who has helped make Roswell safer and its people more educated.

Wrapping up the theme of women who have changed Roswell, brunch guest speaker Cindy Wilson will discuss her past in aerospace technology and her link to Roswell innovator Robert H. Goddard.

Mariano Morones will cater this year's brunch; Sharon Bell will serve as the event's emcee. The brunch will also have door prizes.

Wilson, who is also the brunch's chairperson, is a regional program coordinator and trainer at WESST — which helps coordinate the annual brunch. A company that helps small and medium businesses grow with an emphasis on helping minorities and women, WESST helped found the Women's History Month brunch. This year, WESST further promotes the history of women by supporting a suicide awareness program in addition to the brunch.

Produced by 17-year-old Faith Simitz, the suicide awareness program takes place Tuesday at the Roswell Museum and Art Center's Bassett Auditorium from 7-8 p.m. The free program is part of Simitz' requirement to earn her Gold Award — the highest level attainable within the Girl Scouts.

Described as a talk and video program about one family's journey, the program is also personal to Simitz, whose brother committed suicide.

"We wanted to help this Girl Scout realize her dream," Wilson said about WESST's support of Simitz, who is trying to incorporate suicide awareness into health classes in schools.

Should Simitz achieve her goal of expanding suicide awareness to the schools, she will be joining brunch honorees Jager, Hill Smith and Corn Patterson in helping Roswell in an invaluable way.

Although they may not work together often, when this year's brunch honorees get together, the conversation inevitably turns to the subjects they most care about — such as healthy marriages and stable families as the cornerstones of society, safety, and a subject that's been pivotal in their own lives: education.

"Women have been empowered by education," Hill Smith said. Born in Roswell, Hill Smith graduated from Roswell High in 1963. She began her career with the accounting firm of Deason, Peters and Stockton in 1981. In 1983, she earned her CPA; in 1993, she became the firm's first and only female partner. The firm changed its name to Andrews, Smith, Lowery & Co. before it merged with Accounting & Consulting Group LLP last year.

Hill Smith was appointed to the Board of Trustees at Eastern New Mexico Medical Center in 1995, serving as chairwoman when the hospital was sold to Community Health Systems in 1998.

A fourth-generation New Mexican, Hill Smith said she was taught to do for others.

"We were taught that what we had, we shared," she said. "We were not taught color." These values have compelled Hill Smith in her nonprofit and civic work. She was appointed to the Chaves County CASA Board of Directors in 1991. She saw the program grow from its executive director's — Carrie-Leigh Cloutier's — basement, to where it is now on the third floor of the Bank of America building. She is a member of the Altrusa Club of Roswell and, as a breast cancer survivor, said she is most proud of the club's "Yes Ma'am" program that seeks to create awareness of breast cancer in Chaves County.

Hill Smith is a member of the New Mexico Society of CPAs and the American Institute of CPAs. She said it is important that girls in school do not lose their interest in math, and helps other women on their journey to become a CPA.

"If you come along you need to help somebody come up," she said emphatically.

As an educator, Jager has not only helped others up, but has skillfully turned negative situations into opportunities to do and share good. When her house was burglarized, she started a Neighborhood Watch group where she lives. Her belief in two-parent families as part of a stable society prompted her involvement in Wings for L.I.F.E.

An immigrant from Finland, Jager married an Austrian missionary and followed him to the U.S. several decades ago. Her husband, Reinhard, was killed by a drunk driver in Albuquerque, leaving Jager to raise their two sons alone.

Jager completed a K-8 teaching certification in 1998 and taught a few years at Chisum Elementary. Her youngest son was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma — a type of cancer — around that time, and she became a substitute teacher so she could care for him during his final years.

In honor of her deceased son and late husband, Jager decided to continue her education, completing a master's degree in education from Eastern New Mexico University in 2012. She is now a teacher at the Creative Learning Center. She helps share and promote the arts to about 40 local first-graders. During the summer, she is a tour guide in her native Finland.

"For women here there really are more opportunities," Jager said. She said she appreciates America and how it allows women of all ages to pursue studies and work at the same time. This is in contrast to Europe, she said,

where retirement at age of 55 is encouraged, especially for women. Being recognized by the Women's History Month brunch is also special for Jager.

"I am honored as an immigrant woman," she said.

Education dramatically changed the life of Corn Patterson, perhaps in ways she never would have imagined.

"I was 40 when I decided what I wanted to do," said the award-winning author. Born in Roswell to parents from pioneer families, Corn Patterson married and started a family of her own after graduating from high school. She had four children; and it wasn't until her youngest was in kindergarten that she began taking courses at Eastern New Mexico University- Roswell. She graduated from ENMU-R and became a registered nurse. She later completed a bachelor's in health care administration. She has also been certified in nursing administration and healthcare risk management.

Corn Patterson said her main contribution has been through her work as a nurse. In the 1970s, she was a nurse in Roswell when she became concerned by the fact that there was no donated blood supply in southeast New Mexico. If a patient needed blood, the nearest source was Albuquerque.

"I was a new nurse," she said. "I volunteered to take up the cause." She started a blood donation drawing center with a "starter kit" of sorts, which included such items as a blood pressure monitor and empty blood bags. Corn Patterson said both her family and members of the community helped her cause. In time, she developed United Blood Services in Roswell.

"I think it just shows what one person can do," she said. "You don't have to have a great big fanfare." She noted United Blood Services began with her humble appeals to the community.

Corn Patterson has traveled the world over and been to all states and all continents. She served as a volunteer nurse at a field hospital in Honduras, an act that was recognized with the United States Army Achievement Medal for Volunteer Nursing.

Corn Patterson retired from her position as director of safety and risk management at ENMMC about 10 years ago. Her life today is devoted to writing — a task she eagerly wakes up to tackle at around 4 a.m. each day.

Corn Patterson's first writing endeavor was a memoir titled "The Rock House Ranch," a story that recounts her early life growing up on a ranch. Her second book, "The Woman on the Table," is a collection of short stories that relate to the nursing profession. It was chosen as a finalist in the Arizona-New Mexico Book Awards. Corn Patterson is currently working on a novel.

Created by the National Women's History Project, Women's History Month is given a different theme each year. The theme for 2013 is "Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (also known as STEM).

In keeping with that theme, Wilson was chosen as the speaker at this year's Women's History Month brunch. Wilson was once the youngest manager at Hughes Aircraft, an aerospace technology and defense company in Culver City, Calif. She helped design printed circuit boards for guidance systems, satellites and the Space Shuttle program.

Wilson admits her father, David Skeen, is her hero. Skeen worked on NASA missions from Mercury all the way through the infamous Apollo 13. He knew all the astronauts and the men behind the U.S. space program, Wilson said, as he was one of them.

As a boy in Roswell in the 1930s, Skeen knew Robert H. Goddard, when the inventor was building and launching rockets. Legend has it that Goddard paid Skeen \$5 for each launched rocket he would bring back.

But Skeen was more interested in the rockets themselves than the money.

In fact, it was Wilson's father who was part of the team that brought Apollo 13 home following an explosion on the mother ship. Skeen designed the backup computer system that brought the spacecraft back to Earth, an addition to the ship that was against NASA's weight and money objections. When the infamous Apollo 13 explosion happened, Skeen was flown to a secret base in Australia, where he programmed the computer to guide the damaged ship around the dark side of the moon in a planned trajectory to Earth; so that the ship entered the Earth's atmosphere at such an angle that it would not ignite or explode.

"(I) grew up observing all the action and tension associated with those early days of the race to space," Wilson said, noting that for her, it was personal.

"I had the privilege of knowing some men and women who dared to say, 'I wonder what would happen if,'" she said. "That's why we stand out. We're a country of dreamers."

And as to the importance of honoring women in the community: "It's someone's history. It's all of our collective history. ... It's a celebration of everyone."

Tickets for the brunch are \$13 per person, and can be bought at the door or by calling WESST at 624-9850.



Vanessa Kahin Photo

The three women being honored at this year's Women's History Month celebration brunch. From left: Kaarina Jager, Barbara Corn Patterson and Andrea Hill Smith.

### Women's History Month brunch

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