

## Q & A

BREEZE Ettl

# Looking for a few good women

## 100 Women Strong helps women over life's hurdles

ST. JOSEPH — Breeze Ettl has heard the phone ring more and more with calls from people in need in just the year and a half since she became executive director of the West Michigan Region of the American Red Cross. Thus she knows that the work of 100 Women Strong, which provides financial assistance to women in Berrien County, is vital.

Ettl, president of the nonprofit 100 Women Strong, spoke with Herald-Palladium Staff Writer John Matuszak about the organization's 100/100/100 fundraising campaign.

**What is the mission of 100 Women Strong and what makes the organization unique?**

100 Women Strong was started 15 years ago by a core group of women who saw there was a need to help other women in the community and to fill in the gap for women who social service agencies can't help. This can be women

who are working full-time who can't make ends meet, or women who are going to school, who are barely making ends meet. 100 Women Strong offers a one-time only grant of up to \$500. For example, if a car breaks down and they don't have the money for repairs, that ruins their forward momentum.

**Are there any new programs being offered?**

This year we started providing scholarships to women attending Lake Michigan College. They will be given out in the spring. ... This year we resurrected the 100/100/100 campaign, that 100 Women Strong started with. Our goal is to raise \$100 from 100 women in 100 days, to raise \$10,000. We will conclude the campaign at the end of January (Jan. 25). Of course, we will take any donations.

**What are some of the success stories you have seen?**

We had a woman who was going to school full-time, and working a part-time job. She needed a crown (on her tooth) and had to choose between getting the dental work and buying her books for school. We were able to help her take care of her physical needs,

and she could continue with her education.

**What are the difficult circumstances women often find themselves in?**

Often women are the caregivers of their children, and often carry the full weight of responsibility for their families. They're scrambling from paycheck to paycheck, and then something unexpected happens. ... We had one woman who spoke at our luncheon, her mother had taught her that no matter what you do pay your rent, or if you have a home pay your mortgage, to keep a roof over your head. She couldn't keep up, and it snowballed with court fees and other expenses.

We were able to help her out. And then we coached her on keeping a budget. We would rather them be self-sustaining. We help a lot of women who have mortgages, who own their house. We want them to keep owning their house.

**How did you become involved with 100 Women Strong?**

I've been with the group for three years, and took on the presidency. I heard a story



from one of the women who had been helped by 100 Women Strong. We have all working women on the board. I saw such an opportunity to make a significant difference. This is women helping women, which I think is pretty significant. I think women feel more comfortable going to other women (for help). Women are all about nurturing.

**What else does 100 Women Strong do?**

Besides distributing funds, women can call the help line (269-449-6188). The Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency looks for any other funding sources to meet the client's needs. If there are no other sources, 100 Women Strong steps up.

**Who were the strong women in your life?**

My mother, she's an amazing woman. She earned a Ph.D. and taught at Michigan State in the education

department, and worked with at-risk children.

**I have to ask: Where did you get the name Breeze?**

My mom read it in a book. I don't even remember the name of the book. My parents wanted a unique daughter, and they wanted a unique name.

For information about 100 Women Strong, visit [www.100womenstrongberrien.org](http://www.100womenstrongberrien.org).

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