



AWEC CONNECT

Vol 1 - Issue 1 - 2025

All Women Entrepreneurship Circuit (AWEC) Canada Quarterly Newsletter



To everyone, happy new year! AWEC is thrilled to mark a new milestone this 2025, with the publication of our quarterly newsletter, AWEC Connect. Our community bulletin has finally arrived, albeit long overdue, and we are excited to share with everyone the motivational tales of female-led and female-owned businesses in the Kingston Frontenac Lennox & Addington (KFL&A) region.

Additionally, AWEC Connect will serve as a platform for informing our members, partners, and collaborators on AWEC's community projects and initiatives, as well as the highlights of the events we organized, the exciting events that everyone can look forward to, and the amazing, driven people who make up our all-volunteer nonprofit. We will also be sharing helpful information on resources and business support from our partner organizations.

In this jam-packed first issue, we're bringing you three fantastic brands that are well-liked regulars at our year-round AWEC pop-up markets: loungewear shop Grabbing Grapefruit, personal care brand Mud Creek Soapery and woodwork artisan Penny Royal Creation. We're also featuring Cat House Kingston, a recently opened Thai restaurant owned by Jacky Jantarawong, a popular figure among Kingston pop-up market patrons.

Get a preview of our AWEC membership program and pitch competition, which will soon be introduced! And get to know the unwaveringly passionate AWEC team, of which I am grateful and honored to be working with; the new directors and volunteers who recently joined our community.

Enjoy this inaugural edition of the AWEC Connect. Our nonprofit is eager to share more informative community news and the inspiring stories of incredible female entrepreneurs with you.

Let's toast to more love and light and the wonderful days and months that lie ahead!

Lev ☺

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MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER & OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

Lev Calang

MEET OUR DIRECTORS



Lev Eleazar Calang

Founder & Operations Director

Lev is a serial entrepreneur who loves ticking things off her bucket list. She founded AWEC during her days as a master's student at Smith School of Business Queen's University. Lev's passion for social entrepreneurship spans continents as evidenced by her social impact-driven projects in Canada and the Philippines (a zero waste cafe and a training organization advocating for healthy aging). Lev also dabbles in academic program coordination, training and events consulting, and recently, she self-published a children's book (bucket list tick off!). On rare days when she's not working, Lev can be found doing trail hikes, baking or exploring off the beaten paths somewhere.

Grace Bresee

Memberships Director

With 26 years in the financial industry, Grace expertly coaches families and businesses on money management. A dedicated community volunteer for over 40 years, she enjoys a fulfilling life with her husband of 42 years, their three children, and three grandsons. Grace is passionate about travel and giving back to the community. She recently sponsored a young girl to pursue studies in Africa. Whether through volunteering at local organizations or participating in community events, her passion for making meaningful connections and helping those around her shine through.



Agnes Emefa Kemeh

Events Director

Agnes is an experienced administrative professional with over 5 years of expertise in academic and organizational management. She holds an MBA from the University of Cape Coast and currently works with the Full-Time MBA program at Smith School of Business. Passionate about making a positive impact, Agnes strives to create meaningful change in the lives of others whenever she has the chance. Outside of work, she's an avid learner, loves exploring her creativity through DIY projects, and enjoys volunteering; always seeking new ways to grow, give back, and stay inspired.



Comfort Opoku

Marketing & Communications Director

Driven by her passion for promoting women's progress in today's challenging global environment, Comfort became the MarComm Director of AWEC to advance the organization's mission of creating significant societal impacts that empower women to thrive in their chosen endeavours. She is an experienced human resources and administrative professional, and she is currently the HR Administrator of the Faculty of Arts & Science at Queen's University in Kingston. Comfort holds a master's degree in Industrial Relations from Queen's University, and an MBA in Human Resources Management from Louisiana State University in Shreveport, USA.



Nazish Moledina

Special Projects & Partnerships Director

Nazish Moledina, a Smith School of Business Queen's University MBA graduate, is an experienced professional with over five years of expertise managing quality systems across Asia Pacific. She demonstrates a multifaceted skill set characterized by strong analytical, problem-solving, interpersonal, and communication skills, enabling success through cross-functional collaboration and stakeholder engagement. With an adaptable, resilient, and empathetic leadership style, Nazish is passionate about leveraging her strategic insights to empower individuals and organizations to achieve sustainable growth. She is dedicated to supporting women-centered initiatives and creating meaningful impacts.



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

LUNCH & LEARN

Lunch & Learn sessions were held for our female vendors, supporting them to acquire new skills and enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities. These sessions also offered excellent networking opportunities with experienced professionals and talented entrepreneurs.



VENDOR-FACILITATED WORKSHOPS

AWEC organized specialized vendor-facilitated workshops for women and children, providing fun and creative ways for them to learn new skills, socialize, and enjoy quality family time together!



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

POP-UP MARKETS

All-year round interactive, diverse, and fun-filled pop-up markets that bring together female entrepreneurs and the Kingston community! We aim for our vendors to collaborate, network, and inspire one another in various ways while gaining exposure for their businesses. The year 2024 was no exception!



YEAR-END DINNER

An appreciation dinner for our dedicated vendors and a celebration of our accomplishments for the year that was. Joined by our vendors' supportive family members, the event was also a meaningful opportunity to reflect on the AWEC milestones through the years.



VENDOR SPOTLIGHT



Cristina Poejo
CEO,
Penny Royal Creation

IG: [pennyroyalcreation](https://www.instagram.com/pennyroyalcreation)

I've always been crafty, making holiday and party baskets for family and friends. I love to bake and cook and I have catered many events. I retired two years ago and quickly found out that I was not a sit-at-home-doing-nothing person. I wanted to challenge myself and do something completely different from my skill set which was in Finance. Woodworking is what came to mind.

I researched lots of YouTube videos, and here I am today doing resin and wood charcuterie boards, cutting boards, tea light holders, coasters and crochet bags which I've always crocheted. Two years later I have Pennyroyal which you can find on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/pennyroyalcreation) and Instagram. I've had the pleasure of being part of AWEC for about a year.

AWEC is a great organization; they are well organized, friendly and always professional. The pop-up markets are wonderful, and they provide great exposure and networking opportunities. Through that, I am building my brand and I have fostered good connections with talented female entrepreneurs.

I made my first batch of soap 24 years ago, wanting better choices for my family. In 2018, I started making and selling handcrafted soaps as a hobby which led to the establishment of Mud Creek Soapery.

Today, it has grown into a wide variety of bath and body products such as soaps, body butter, shower frosting, shampoo and conditioner bars, lip balm, shower steamers, bath bombs, bath dust, and foaming bath salts. I also grow my own loofahs! All our products are made with the highest quality ingredients.

Mud Creek Soapery has been with AWEC since 2022. I have always enjoyed participating in their pop-up markets, lunch and learn sessions, and their women wellness events due to its friendly atmosphere and the exposure it presents, the wealth of knowledge they share, and they generally care about women in the workplace, especially female-owned businesses! You can find Mud Creek Soapery on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/mudcreeksoapery) and Instagram.



Tammy Rogers
OWNER,
Mud Creek Soapery

IG: [mudcreeksoapery](https://www.instagram.com/mudcreeksoapery)



Kailey Killoran & Abigail Gill
OWNERS,
Grabbing Grapefruit

IG: [grabbinggrapefruit](https://www.instagram.com/grabbinggrapefruit)

Grabbing Grapefruit is a high quality loungewear brand co-founded by best friends Kailey Killoran and Abigail Gill, to provide cozy, size-inclusive, and high-quality pieces for women who value comfort.

We officially launched our business in 2022, driven by a shared passion for creating loungewear that seamlessly fits into the lives of women. Our product line includes thoughtfully designed hoodies, sweatpants, and sweatshirts that are perfect for relaxing at home, running errands, or enjoying brunch with friends.

We joined AWEC in 2023, and it has been such a rewarding experience! We particularly love the sense of community and the opportunity to connect with like-minded entrepreneurs during pop-up events. These markets not only provide excellent exposure but also allow us to personally engage with customers who inspire us to keep innovating.

Visit our website: www.grabbinggrapefruit.com

SPECIAL FEATURE

FROM THAILAND TO CANADA: CAT HOUSE CHIANGMAI RESTAURANT KINGSTON

As a woman, starting and operating a restaurant in a completely different geographical setting is no small feat, but Jacky Jantarawong has successfully conquered obstacles to make her mark in Canada. Read more and discover the fascinating journey that led to the official launch of the Cat House Restaurant in Kingston!



Jacky serving her best-selling Thai dishes!

Can you tell us about yourself and your background?

My name is Jacky, and I moved from Thailand to Canada in 2014. My spouse is Canadian, and we met in a restaurant in Thailand. He's the reason I moved to Canada. Cooking is my passion and I'd say that I spent most of my childhood in the kitchen. My family has a restaurant in Thailand, and I was highly involved in running the business.

What inspired you to start your own restaurant business in Kingston?

I was mostly inspired by my husband and the people I met in Kingston. When some of my friends in Kingston learned that I was from Thailand and worked in the restaurant industry, specifically Thai food, they would request me to cook some Thai meals for them, and their feedback was always encouraging. Lev Calang introduced me to AWEC, and she created a pivotal role by urging me to join AWEC's pop-up markets as a food vendor. I discovered that a lot of people enjoyed my Thai recipes at the markets, and this fueled my desire to establish the Cat House in Kingston. We officially launched and opened for dine-in on January 2 this year.

Did you face any challenges or discover advantages while participating in AWEC's pop-up markets?

Selling food to the public entails strict guidelines and requirements that need to be followed. There were also times when the weather was not favorable. Also, there's the issue of leftovers; but this did not discourage me.

The beneficial aspect was the exposure I gained through AWEC. This gave me hope that I could do something bigger than just showing up at the pop-up markets, such as having a regular meal spot for people to enjoy their favorite Thai foods.

Can you describe the overall concept of your restaurant?

The Cat House concept started about 15 years ago in Thailand when we established a restaurant setting where people could order a variety of Thai foods and, at the same time, shop for products and engage in recreational activities. A similar concept was incorporated in the Cat House Kingston. Aside from food, our customers can shop authentic Thai / Asian products (fashion items & pantry essentials) at the restaurant. We also host events, including workshops and learning sessions for the local community in collaboration with AWEC.



FB: Cat House Chiangmai at Kingston

SPECIAL FEATURE

FROM THAILAND TO CANADA: CAT HOUSE CHIANGMAI RESTAURANT KINGSTON



What type of cuisine do you specialize in at the Cat House Kingston?

We specialize in bestselling Thai foods and a variety of noodles and stir fry dishes. Though I was born in Southern Thailand, my parents are from Northern Thailand and so I incorporated the food culture of Northern Thailand in my menu. We also have baked goods, desserts and treats.

What is the top-selling item on your menu, or what do your customers enjoy most at your restaurant?

Based on the feedback from our customers, they mostly enjoy our curry and stir fry dishes. We also have variety of Thai dishes that we serve at specific times of the day, and our customers love them.

How do you achieve a balance between work and personal life while managing your restaurant?

My family supports me, especially my daughter and my husband. As a family business, I engage my children for them to learn cooking skills. We spend quality time together while helping me in the daily operations of Cat House.

Have you faced any challenges as a female entrepreneur? How did you overcome these challenges?

Operating in an industry where you also deal with male service providers is sometimes a challenge. As a female business owner, I try to stay assertive and strong, while ensuring my business priorities are addressed.

What are your future aspirations for Cat House and yourself?

Cat House is what supports me and my family here in Canada, so it is my aspiration for this business to run smoothly and thrive. And I hope to find more time to visit my family back home in Thailand. Family is everything.

What do you like best about AWEC?

Being part of AWEC has been very beneficial. AWEC brings together female entrepreneurs with diverse businesses and talents, providing great support and networking opportunities. I encourage female business owners to join the AWEC community and reap the exciting benefits AWEC provides.



Location: 660 Progress Ave., Kingston ON

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Pravitha Gopisetty
Student Volunteer
Events & Logistics

I'm Pravitha Gopisetty, an internationally trained Dentist from India. I arrived in Canada in September 2024 as an international student, and I'm currently pursuing post-graduate studies in Healthcare Administration program at St. Lawrence College. Alongside my studies, I am passionate about giving back to the community and contributing to meaningful causes.

I first heard about AWEC from one of their volunteers, who happens to be a close friend. She explained all about the organization, and I was immediately drawn to its mission of empowering women and supporting women-owned businesses. I happily signed up as a volunteer, as I deeply value the idea of being part of a women-owned and women-empowering community.

As a volunteer for AWEC, I assist with organizing events and engaging with the local community to support the organization's initiatives. This role allows me to connect with incredible women entrepreneurs, learn from their experiences, and actively contribute to creating a supportive environment for women to thrive. Being part of AWEC has been a truly enriching experience. I am grateful to be part of a community that uplifts and empowers women while fostering meaningful connections. Thank you AWEC for this amazing opportunity!

My name is Minh Ngoc Tran, and I am from Vietnam. You can call me Lisa. I arrived in Canada in August 2024 to pursue my studies. I am currently a first-year student at St. Lawrence College, majoring in Early Childhood Education.

I heard about AWEC through one of my friends who invited me to join their organization as a volunteer. My responsibility in this volunteer role is assisting with marketing communication and digital design, which includes creating event posters and documenting events through photos and videos. I also assist with logistical tasks during pop-up markets, workshops and learning events.

Volunteering for AWEC makes me happy because it fulfills my passion in making a positive impact to the local community. At the same time, I'm able to gain valuable experience and skills, and expand my professional network and career opportunities. Overall, it is a personally rewarding experience.



Minh Ngoc Tran
Student Volunteer
Marketing Comms &
Digital Design

As a mechanical engineer eager to expand my domain and formally learn more about business, I came to Canada to pursue my MBA due to its diversity and immigrant-friendly policies. The promptness and helpful nature of the alumni from Smith School of Business were pivotal factors that drove my decision. Soon, I was experiencing my first Canadian winter in Kingston as I braced for a busy 2024.

I have always believed in giving back to the community and didn't want to miss any such opportunity. While at Smith, AWEC's founder introduced me to her nonprofit through the MBA Women in Leadership Club that partnered with AWEC for one of the pop-up markets at the Tett Centre. I signed up as a volunteer and helped manage AWEC's social media handles. I am currently volunteering in various roles, from logistics during events to consulting with vendors.

I have made many friends by volunteering for AWEC. I not only felt like a part of the community but also gained satisfaction from supporting local vendors in their entrepreneurial endeavors. The joy of helping a group of motivated women with entrepreneurial spirit made me volunteer with AWEC. I am excited to see the circuit reach new heights this year.



Vivek Raj
Student Volunteer
Events & Logistics

ANNOUNCEMENTS

AWEC MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

Become part of a vibrant community of women dedicated to business growth, personal empowerment, and holistic wellness. Enjoy exclusive access to events, resources, and support that will elevate your personal and entrepreneurial journey!

Join the AWEC community today!



WHO CAN JOIN

Open to all female business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs who are passionate about personal and professional growth.

Whether you are just starting your business journey, looking to expand your existing venture, or seeking a supportive community of like-minded women, our membership is designed for you.

We welcome female entrepreneurs from diverse background and industries, at any stage of their business journey.



MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- Business exposure
- Networking & mentorship
- Business consulting
- Wellness events
- Lunch & learn events
- Exclusive discounts & MORE!



HOW TO JOIN

Check out **AWEC MEMBERSHIPS** to register online. Join any of our upcoming Lunch & Learn / Membership Mixer Sessions to register in-person.

Become a registered member of AWEC and gain access to a wealth of resources, networking opportunities, and a supportive community dedicated to your success. We can't wait to welcome you aboard!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

AWEC PITCH YOUR VISION COMPETITION 2025

Are you a female founder eager to advance your business?

Participate in this year’s AWEC business pitch competition for an opportunity to strengthen your brand and amplify your impact! The program this year consists of an **8-week brand marketing bootcamp** culminating in a **business pitch competition** where founders can compete to **win cash prizes**.



WHO CAN JOIN

The program is **open to all female entrepreneurs at all stages of their business**.

- You must be residing in the Kingston Frontenac Lennox & Addington (KFL&A) region
- Have a functional business
- Ready and committed to attending all bootcamp sessions virtually or in-person



APPLICATION DETAILS

- Complete an online application form
- Attend a virtual interview

APPLICATIONS OPEN FEBRUARY 15

Keep posted for details!



CONTEST SCHEDULE

- FEB 15 - Applications open
- MARCH 15 - Application deadline
- APRIL 4 - Program participants announced
- MAY - JULY - Brand marketing bootcamp
- AUGUST 11 - 22 - Semi-finals pitch days
- AUGUST 30 - Finalists announced
- SEPTEMBER 30 - Deadline to submit final pitch decks
- OCTOBER 18 - Finals pitch day and awarding ceremony

ANNOUNCEMENTS

KEYS CEO PROGRAM FOR WOMEN

Creating Enterprise Opportunities (CEO) Program is dedicated to empowering women to achieve greater social and economic power **through entrepreneurship**. Whether you have an idea you've been holding onto or a small business you want to grow, the CEO program will **help you create opportunities** and **build a brighter future for yourself, your family and your community!**



WHAT IT ENTAILS

The program includes:

- 4 weeks of group based entrepreneurial training
- 6 weeks of mentorship and coaching, ongoing support and community.

KEYS is here to help you succeed!



PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

To be Eligible:

- You are motivated to make a change and work towards your business and financial goals
- Meet low-income eligibility criteria, have non-permanent work, and/or experiencing financial hardship
- You are a Canadian citizen, refugee, or permanent resident



CONTACT KEYS

Not sure if you qualify?

Check out **CEO Program for Women | KEYS Job Centre** or contact **ceo@keys.ca** to learn more



1ST QUARTER EVENTS

FEBRUARY

8

VALENTINE'S INDOOR POP-UP MARKET AT THE TETT CENTRE

10:30 am to 4:00 pm

Vendor registration is already closed

FEBRUARY

23

PAINT & SIP AT THE CAT HOUSE CHIANGMAI RESTAURANT KINGSTON

2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Facilitated by: Polka Peppers (Monica Montero)

MARCH

8

AWEC INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (IWD) OUTREACH

with Elizabeth Fry

MARCH

TBA

SPRING INDOOR POP-UP MARKET

10:30 am - 4:00 pm

Date, venue and vendor registration to be announced

MARCH

29

SPRING LUNCH & LEARN MIXER

11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Digital Marketing & Social Media Strategies
Networking & Building Connections

Venue and registration to be announced

CONNECT WITH US

VOLUNTEER WITH AWEC!

AWEC has exciting volunteer opportunities for students, individuals and groups in Kingston. These are value-adding roles in **MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS, GRAPHIC DESIGN, BUSINESS CONSULTING** and **EVENTS COORDINATION** that will enrich your learning experience and background.

Interested to become a volunteer?

Get in touch with us at: **awecbazaar@gmail.com**



www.awecca.com



[@Awec Canada](https://www.facebook.com/AwecCanada)



[@AWEC Canada
\(All Women
Entrepreneurship
Circuit\)](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AWEC%20Canada%20(All%20Women%20Entrepreneurship%20Circuit))



[@awec.ca](https://www.instagram.com/awec.ca)

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AWEC is a proud member of Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce (GKCC)