



COMMUNITY ACTIVIST, LAWYER

MEET **MARY ANN BUDENSKE**, CLASS OF 1966. LAWYER,
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

Mary Ann Budenske

Meet Mary Anne Budenske, a woman who never lost sight of her goals, even when life put up roadblocks.

Mary Ann graduated from Faribault High School in 1966. Her goal was to someday become a lawyer and live a life without financial challenges, but that wasn't going to be easy. After high school graduation, she headed to college in Mankato but was unable to complete her dream at that time. From there she moved to Colorado and eventually to Wyoming.

While in Colorado, Mary Ann worked as a realtor and also started her family. In 1987 she left Colorado as a single parent with a four-year degree and her real estate license. She hoped to find work and a place to live in Casper, Wyoming. It didn't happen. The economy in Wyoming was in the depths of a bust; there was no day care available, and she couldn't find a job.

"When I sold real estate in Colorado, I thought people were poor by choice...and if you really wanted a job, you could find one." Budenske said. "It really set me back. I had to re-evaluate."

She bartered free rent in exchange for cleaning nearby apartments. She then convinced the owner to hire her to manage one of his buildings. Shortly after, she took over an abandoned consignment shop on the property

and transformed it into a thrift store and food pantry called Poverty Resistance. Poverty Resistance has become a downtown staple in Casper. Through difficult circumstances, she served about 460,000 pounds of food a year to as many as 80,000 visitors. Budenske has recently stepped away from the nonprofit's daily operations, but still performs some legal and tax work for the food pantry.

During her early years in Wyoming, Budenske realized that if she wanted to help people even more she would need to get her law degree. While on public support, she went back to school and eventually obtained her degree and began helping marginalized people with legal issues. As a legal aide intern, she handled 90 entitlement cases a year. She'd often walk into court with the thick book of regulations held tightly under her arm. After she was licensed, she also helped women obtain divorces. "People don't understand how, and often don't have the time or money, to navigate the legal and government resources available to them," Budenske said.

City manager John Patterson said, "I don't think she can help herself. She's a fierce advocate. She's dedicated her life to serving others. She's out there on the frontlines daily making life better for her fellow man."