

Francine M. Farber: March is cause for celebration of women's history

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BY FRANCINE M. FARBER

There are plenty of things to acknowledge in March. If you like short celebrations, try National Pig Day (March 1), If Pets Had Thumbs Day (March 3), Ear Muff Day (March 13), Extra Terrestrial Abductions Day (March 20), or Something on a Stick Day (March 28). For longer partying, try National Bubble Week or National Crochet Week.

But my recommendation is the month-long celebration of women's history. Sponsored by the National Women's History Project annually, each year a presidential proclamation recognizes the extraordinary achievements of American women. This year, the theme is recognition of women who have exhibited character, courage and commitment. Locally, we are fortunate to have such women in leadership roles: Mayor Ashley Swearingin, Sheriff Margaret Mims, Fire Chief Kerri Donis and Fresno County Clerk Brandi Orth.

Most people will not be familiar with all of the national honorees each year. But when you learn what they have accomplished, you will understand why they are being recognized. For 2014, the honorees follow.

Chipeta (1843-1924) was an Apache raised in the Ute tribe in western Colorado. She was a wise adviser to her husband and a peacemaker who often gave food to starving white families.

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (1858-1964) was born into enslavement and is considered to be one of the first advocates for black feminism. She focused on preparing black high school students for higher education.

Agatha Tiegel Hanson (1873-1959) was deaf as well as blind in one eye. She graduated first in her class from Gallaudet University, which is dedicated to the education of deaf and hard of hearing students.

Katharine Ryan Gibbs (1863-1934) founded the Katharine Gibbs School in 1911 to provide high-level secretarial training and enable women to earn their own incomes.

Frances Oldham Kelsey (1914-present) was a pharmacologist for the FDA who refused to approve thalidomide, a drug that was later proved to cause severe birth defects. She retired at age 91.

Roxcy O'Neal Bolton (1926-present) is a lifelong advocate for women's rights who founded Florida's first battered women's shelter. She convinced National Airlines to offer maternity leave instead of firing pregnant flight attendants.

Arden Eversmeyer (1931-present) founded the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project to ensure that lesbians born in the early 20th century who were labeled mentally ill, fired from their jobs, rejected by their families and even raped and murdered with impunity are recorded in history.

Carmen Delgado Votaw (1935-present) is an international women's rights activist who has worked for more than 50 years for the betterment of women, children, Latinos and other minorities throughout the world.

Ann Frank Lewis (1937-present) grew up in a Jewish family that had witnessed the Holocaust. With the name Ann Frank, she was taught by her parents how fortunate she was to live in a democracy. She served as a White House communications director and focuses on the importance of personal engagement and social justice.

Jaida Im (1937-present) founded the first residential shelter for adult female survivors of human trafficking. Recently, she opened Freedom House to serve girls ages 12-17.

Tammy Duckworth (1968-present), U.S. representative from Illinois, is an Iraq War veteran and the first disabled woman elected to serve in the House. She had been deployed to Iraq as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot and was one of the first Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. She lost her legs and partial use of her right arm in an explosion and was awarded a Purple Heart for her combat injuries.

Lisa Taylor (1974-present) is a civil rights trial attorney who has focused on educational and disability law. She was in Naval ROTC as a student and served as an officer aboard the USS Tarawa where she developed the ship's first program to address sexual harassment.

All of these women, and many others, deserve recognition for their lasting contributions.