

A celebration of women in charge of business in Harvard Square

By [Jeremy White/Correspondent](#)

Wicked Local Cambridge

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Cambridge — As the nation celebrates Women's History Month, Cambridge residents can take pride in the fact that dozens of Harvard Square businesses have women at the helm.

Harvard Square Business Association catalogues over 50 females who own businesses, ranging from fledgling restaurants to established Harvard Square institutions.

Mr. Bartley's Gourmet Burgers has drawn sandwich-seeking patrons for decades, but the name is somewhat misleading. In reality, it has always been a family business, co-owner Joan Bartley said.

In 1960, Bartley and her husband took over what had been a grocery store and converted it into a burger restaurant. Although she was involved in running the business during the peak of the feminist movement, Bartley said she was simply looking for a way to pay the bills.

"When we started it was just sort of a way of life," she said. "It was something that was necessary for survival in those days."

It goes without saying that the things have changed since the 1960s. Marley Brush, a 25-year-old co-owner of the recently opened Crema Café, said she has run into more difficulties because of her youth than for her gender.

Still, Brush said it has been helpful to have Harvard Square colleagues "who have supported our business and are happy to see women doing things."

"It's nice to have that network and that support from women who want you to succeed," she said.

Jude Silver has owned MDF and Motto, adjacent vendors of handmade crafts and jewelry, for 29 years. Silver said she has "always been self-employed" and that her gender has never been an impediment to success.

"I've never had any resistance at all," she said.

Executive director of the Brattle Theater Ivy Moylan said that although corporate film studios still tend to employ more men than women, she has never had any trouble.

Still, Moylan said she has had experiences, including during film school, where she was in the severe minority. She said the prevalence of established Harvard women is a welcome change.

"It definitely makes me more comfortable at business and networking meetings that there are other women in leadership positions in the room," she said.