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In honor of Women's History Month, Sen. Smith writes about five inspiring women from west-central Wisconsin.

MADISON - March is Women's History Month, an opportunity to remind ourselves of the contributions of women that history books may often overlook. From my own experiences, the women in my life, including my wife, daughters, friends and relatives are almost always the most reliable, determined, innovative and trustworthy.

Some women stick out in Wisconsin history such as Ada Deer, Vel Phillips, Shirley Abrahamson or even Laura Ingalls Wilder, who was born in Pepin. But I'd like to focus on women from west-central Wisconsin who may not be as familiar, but who have significantly impacted the lives of others.

Betsy Thunder was born near Black River Falls in the 1850s. She was a member of the Ho-Chunk tribe, also called the Winnebago Sky Clan. Known for her skills in medicinal remedies from roots and plants, Betsy treated both Ho-Chunk and white patients. She was credited with saving the life of a child of businessman and politician, Hugh Mills, who in turn built her a small cabin as a sign of appreciation. In the early 1900s, the US government ordered Thunder's tribe to be moved from Wisconsin to Nebraska. Betsy, however, refused to leave and hid in the hills of Jackson County until her death in 1912.

Mountain Wolf Woman also resided on the land we recognize as Jackson County. She was born in 1884 into the Thunder Clan of the Ho-Chunk tribe. In 1958, she shared her life story as a Native American woman to a University of Wisconsin anthropologist. This autobiography was seen as an important point in Native American history as it was one of the earliest first-hand accounts of the experiences documented of a Native American woman. Her story detailed seventy-five years of Native American life and the role of women in native cultures.

Sarah Harder was born in 1937 in Chicago. She moved to La Crosse and started teaching later at UW-Eau Claire. She revolutionized the maternity leave program for the UW System and founded the women's studies program at UW-Eau Claire. She is a strong activist for women's rights and has been involved with many women's organizations, serving as a founding member of the Wisconsin Women's Network and President for the American Association of University Women.

Carol Bartz was born in 1948 in Minnesota and moved to Alma, Wisconsin at a young age. She earned a degree in computer science from UW-Madison in 1971. She worked at multiple companies and faced frequent gender discrimination. She persevered and was named CEO of Autodesk, Inc. Despite being diagnosed with breast cancer while at Autodesk, she increased the company's revenue by hundreds of millions. She then became the CEO of Yahoo!, a Fortune 500 company, restructuring the organization to address discrimination in the workplace.

Ellen Kort was born in Glenwood City and lived in Menomonie. She wrote poetry throughout her whole life and was appointed as the state's first poet laureate in 2000 by Governor Tommy Thompson. She shared her poetry widely; her words are inscribed in multiple buildings throughout Wisconsin. She received multiple awards for her poetry as well, including the Pablo Neruda Literary Prize for Poetry. She also helped survivors of AIDS, cancer, and domestic abuse heal through her writing workshops.

The women I've spotlighted should serve as inspiration for all of us. They came from humble beginnings but were determined to achieve great success, despite facing adversity.

We can all learn and be inspired by the women who accomplished so much and are

remembered in our history. Even more so, we can be inspired and motivated by the dedicated women we're with day-to-day. Too often, women have to work twice as hard as men to earn the recognition they deserve. If more people recognize women's contributions, I think we can reach a day when this is no longer the case; I look forward to this day.

Thank you to all the women I've had the pleasure to work with throughout my life for they have always inspired me and made me a better person.

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Note: Information about the women mentioned in this column is attributed to the Wisconsin Women Making History partnership

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