



Above: WBN Members Valerie Larsen, Kathy Jordan, Monica Fernandes and Dotty Wyman

Area networking group shares advice on everything from childcare to Web design

By Paula Vogler, *Easton Journal*

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It has been said that the kitchen is the most popular gathering place in a home. For the Women's' Business Network of Southeastern Massachusetts that was particularly true five years ago when a handful of women got together to talk.

A more than 50-member organization has grown from those early kitchen meetings at founder Sue Finn's home in Easton, providing support and information to women in business for themselves.

Finn, owner of Buttonwood Originals, said she and the other women all had ideas for businesses in their minds and thought it would be good to get together and share those ideas as well as tips on promoting their business.

"Mainly we got together to share the challenges of being a woman in business," Finn said. "How do you concentrate on your business if the kids are sick, you have to be at their school and the laundry needs to be done."

The group began meeting at the former Peri's Restaurant and started by bringing in guest speakers with knowledge about marketing, accounting, and anything else in business that could be of value to the women.

Today they meet on the second Tuesday of the month at the Mansfield Town Hall from 9:30-11:30 a.m. from September through June. In addition to the members, Finn said there are more than 120 women on the group's email list.

Meetings offer a lot to members touching on topics like how to dress for success in the business world and how to get a tax number to testimonials about how members have helped each other.

Finn said women tend to network much differently than men. They are much more willing to share, professionally as well as personally, even among those who are competitors. She used two professional organizers who are members as an example.

“They have both been very active for three years,” Finn said. “They get up and talk about each other in such kind ways. There’s never any animosity.”

Elizabeth Olson of Mansfield, owner of the Card Cachet, has been with the group from the beginning and joined when a friend told her she would like the people.

“They are very supportive,” Olson said. “They are very attuned to what is happening in the world with women trying to start their own business. (I’ve received) a wealth of information from this group.”

Olson said one speaker was a woman who works for a nonprofit group that helps businesswomen get their companies on the Web. She taught the group how to add links from their Web site to other sites as well as how to make sure their company Web address would come up near the top of a Google search.

“It was phenomenal,” Olson said. “We all learned from it.”

Valerie Larsen of Valerie Larsen Photography in Norton has been a member of the Network for just more than one year. She said she joined because she was looking for other women in small businesses she could network with.

She said because the group meets in the morning she is able to attend other group meetings in the evening.

“I especially like the Women’s Business Network because they are a group of wonderful, nice women who are looking to grow their business and everyone wants to help each other out,” Larsen said. “It’s a very energetic, warm, welcoming environment.”

Larsen said she enjoys the time during each meeting when a member or two can get up and give a 10-minute spotlight of themselves.

“You can really get a feeling of what members do,” Larsen said. “One woman sews her own curtains; you wouldn’t know that if she just said, ‘I’m an interior decorator.’”

Finn said anyone is welcome to join the group but she suggests attending as a guest first. The guest fee is \$10 and can be used toward the \$75 yearly fee afterwards.

“You want to make sure it’s something that interests you and that you like the dynamics,” Finn said. “We not only try to build better businesses, we try to give each other hints on how to improve our personal lives and foster friendships.”

For more information visit the organization’s Web site at www.womensbusinessnetwork.webs.com.

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