

Long Island Business NEWS

Where Business Gets Down to Business

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They are women, see them network

By Ambrose Clancy

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Eva Lopez's business can be traced along a string of glass beads stretching from Barcelona to Port Jefferson.

Lopez was one of 74 vendors, most selling arts and crafts, who came to the Middle Country Public Library in Centereach recently for the seventh annual Women's Expo – a networking and growth opportunity designed specifically for women-owned businesses. The event was presented by the Long Island Fund for Women & Girls, the Middle Country Library Foundation and the library's Miller Business Resource Center.

Surrounded by a swarm of visitors – over 1,000 just 10 minutes after the expo opened – Lopez described how she fell in love with glass jewelry. It “was all around you in Barcelona,” where she spent a year teaching almost a decade ago, she said.

For the past year, Lopez has designed and fired her own creations for her Port Jefferson gallery, Casa Artistica, where she also teaches jewelry making. Business has been so good, demand is catching up to her capacity to turn out product, Lopez said, and now she's looking for more space and thinking about bringing on some gallery help. She might even begin wholesaling glass beads.

The Women's Expo has helped her business, she said, by delivering customers and helping a small business with virtually no marketing funds get noticed.

On Oct. 3, getting noticed was not a problem for the vendors crammed into every corner of the sprawling Centereach library.

Women don't divide and conquer, according to Ann Garbarino, business advisor at the Small Business Development Center at SUNY Stony Brook – they network. And the expo had plenty of that, with discussions on corporate and not-for-profit sponsorship opportunities, business counseling services and numerous small-business workshops.

Among the hottest topics, Garbarino said, were “drawing boundaries” between family and business and the need “to take yourself seriously.”

One serious success story that has emerged from the Women's Expo is Hampton Bay Creations, owned by Josephine Barrera, who has attended the event in the past. Barrera started doing decorative painting on small-scale objects and soon began selling wineglasses with her floral decorations to Water Mill's Duck Walk Vineyards. She then made an arrangement with Talmadge Agway in Riverhead to decorate birdbaths; that became so successful that Talmadge asked her to expand to mailboxes.

The Women's Expo gave her something she and every small startup need to grow, Barrera said: confidence.

"Every entrepreneur needs encouragement," she said. "When I first went to the expo, I got a burst of confidence, which enabled me to continue and to try different designs."

Attorney and consultant Lisa Renee Pomerantz headed an Oct. 3 workshop on taking "networking to next level, which is strategic alliances." Networking can't just be exchanging business cards, she said – committed alliances must be forged in order to grow.

One of the biggest hurdles for women entrepreneurs to overcome is "isolation," Pomerantz added, and forging alliances is one of the best ways to overcome it.

Shurie Green, owner of International Tees, was doing brisk business at her expo spot. She's been to all seven of these events, and her business has grown from making decorative T-shirts to being a licensed distributor of promotional materials.

Green praised the expo and its networking opportunities. "You have to get out there," she said. "Talk, talk, talk to everyone, and find out what they do and what they want, and you're halfway there."

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