

## For Love of Business: Second annual Business Sisters Conference a success

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Left to right: Geneviève Rochon, Strategy, Content & Design; Tracey D'Aviero, Your VA Mentor; Betty Healey, RoadSigns; Heather Boyd, Pillar IP; Doreen Ashton Wagner, The Business Sisters Host; Laurieann Sheldrick, Contagiously Positive; Binal Bhavsar, Cornwall & The Counties CFDC; Marie-Josée Lévesque, PARO; Ann Max, Productive to the MAX; Rose D'Amato and Raina Sharma, BDC; Diana Lidstone, The Entrepreneur's GPS. - TARA MACDONALD

The second annual Business Sisters Conference was held at the Glengarry Sports Palace in Alexandria on Saturday, October 26<sup>th</sup>.

A huge success, the full-day event brought together more than 88 businesswomen and entrepreneurs from across Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. According to organizer Doreen Ashton Wagner, the purpose of the conference was to nurture a culture that encourages and educates women on how to identify their value, improve their practices, and achieve success through shared experience

“For me, it’s perhaps how a teacher feels in the classroom when her students really engage with the subject matter, learn together, and create awesome projects,” said Ms. Ashton Wagner. “The initial effort is put in by the teacher to create the environment, the lesson plan, and of course the delivery in the classroom but it’s the students who get together and do the work.”

The conference brought together experts from across Eastern Ontario to share knowledge and shape the dialogue about inclusive leadership and other critical factors related to women in business.

“Entrepreneurial women often feel isolated or lonely, especially when they are working from home,” said guest speaker and best-selling business author Diana Lidstone. “Events like this brings women together and facilitates a real sense of feminine entrepreneurial community! Sharing experiences, feelings, and knowing there is support - I believe - gives them a sense of renewal, motivation and true support.”

Ms. Lidstone’s views were shared by many conference participants. “We can live our lives so much in isolation thinking we’re the only ones experiencing these things,” exclaimed businesswoman and Deputy Mayor of North Glengarry Carma Williams, “but you come to these events and realize you’re not alone. You have shared common experiences not only in business but in life in general.”

Katherine MacDonald of Munro & Morris Funeral Homes Ltd. agreed, “The biggest take-away from the event for me - both personally and business - was being able to be around like-minded people who shared the same enthusiasm about entrepreneurship and that there are so many of us out there in such a small geographic area.”

Another key take-away, according to Mrs. MacDonald, was the lessons-learned from tech entrepreneur Shannon Ferguson’s ‘Playing with the Big Boys’. “One of the speakers was addressing the point of how men carry themselves amongst colleagues, and so on. I do not have those qualities. I am what the world views as very feminine. I am emotional. I am sensitive. I am motherly. I am quiet and soft spoken yet strong-minded and determined. This is what I bring to the table as a women in my business,” explained Mrs. MacDonald. “It would be beautiful to see women be more confident in just simply being who they are and find strength in the qualities they bring to the table of their own business, letting that synergy happen with their qualities and the business they chose.”



“It was just so refreshing to be surrounded by women on the same journey, sharing in some of the same triumphs, successes and trials. It was very empowering and supportive.” - Katherine MacDonald of Munro & Morris Funeral Homes Ltd. – TARA MACDOANLD

For Mrs. Williams, the negotiation talk by Ruth Sirman also held a lot of staying-power not only as a businesswoman but also as a member of council. “If you sit silently and don’t advocate for what you believe in, your message won’t be heard and you won’t be able to move initiatives forward that are good for your community.” For Mrs. Williams, the event held value not only for women entrepreneurs but for women generally. “We’re lucky to have someone like Doreen Ashton Wagner in our community,” she said. “The event is something that is much needed in our community. It’s valuable not just in terms of women entrepreneurs but just to bring women together to support each other. Women - in any community across Canada - would benefit from participating in an event like this.”

It was the desire to share and support other women that brought a number of people to the conference not only as speakers but also as presenters and volunteers.

“I’m not always comfortable speaking about myself and my accomplishments,” admitted Lynda Turner, President of Fauxmagerie Zengarry in Alexandria who started her business out of her home kitchen and is now expanding her line of cheeses across Canada. Nevertheless, Ms. Turner realized the importance of supporting other women in the community.

“I think there are a lack of resources for female entrepreneurs. In Cornwall there is Launch Lab, but here we do not have access to mentors etc. It’s also not always easy to find these resources when you don’t know where to look,” she explained. For Ms. Turner, the key take-away that she wanted to instill in women was that they can do it too. “I had little formal business training when I got started,” she said, “but it’s possible to figure things out as you go along.”

“Sharing your life experiences and your knowledge can help so many women evade possible situations that you went through and help simplify their lives,” added H  l  ne Faubert who volunteered her time to help make this year’s event a success. Coming from a long and successful career as an auctioneer, H  l  ne Faubert was quick to recognize the value that the Business Sisters Conference brought to local women entrepreneurs. “Knowledge is power,” she said. “I want to see more women do things they don’t think they can do.”