Women Helping Women in Business

Each year, International Women’s Day marks women’s efforts over the years to attain justice and equality for themselves, their families and their networks. It is a time for women around the world to commemorate their struggles and celebrate their achievements.

In the past 60 years, women have made significant advancements in the business world and are making their presence known in the workforce – not just as employees, but as entrepreneurs and leaders, as well. In fact, many of today’s female entrepreneurs are so successful, it’s easy to assume that high-profile businesswomen have always been a feature of our economy. We know, however, that it hasn’t always been so.

From history, we know the difficult struggles and unique challenges women in business have faced, which have both created opportunities for women’s advancement and limited their growth professionally. By examining the history of successful businesswomen, we recognize that the accomplishments of today’s outstanding female entrepreneurs owe much to the groundwork of earlier generations.

Today, women entrepreneurs are one of the fastest growing segments of our economy and represent a rising economic force. In fact, between 1981 and 2001, the number of women entrepreneurs in Canada increased by 208 per cent compared to a modest 38 per cent increase for men. Manitoba women are facing the challenges and risks, and embracing the rewards of entrepreneurship in ever-increasing numbers. Many are doing this while raising families, acting as advocates for change in their communities and fighting gender discrimination.

Manitoba’s business community is blessed with some very visible icons of women’s entrepreneurial achievement. These successful business leaders have much to offer emerging entrepreneurs. Yet, as we reflect on the accomplishments, contributions and achievements of today’s businesswomen, we must also remember the women who worked so hard to make their success possible – then, consider how we can better help women business owners of the future.

Minister’s Message

As Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I am pleased to introduce this publication celebrating International Women’s Day (IWD) in Manitoba. Each year on IWD, thousands of events are held throughout the world where women connect to celebrate and honour the economic, political and social accomplishments of women. Today, in Manitoba, we continue this tradition and proudly reflect on, and celebrate, the advancement towards equality for women.

For 2012, we have chosen to recognize and celebrate women in business in our province. Women are reaching new heights in the business community every day. In this publication, we profile some of these women who are mentoring others, making history, breaking barriers and improving the lives of women and their families.

Women have the passion, power and capacity to inspire their communities and make the world a better place. More than ever before, women play many different roles in their lives. They are workers, parents, spouses, friends and volunteers in their communities. At the same time, they must make room in their lives for taking care of themselves – their physical and mental well-being. Not surprisingly, achieving balance among these competing priorities can be difficult.

The women featured in this publication have all shared their strengths and expertise. They have worked to support other women in achieving their personal and career goals. These inspirational women have reached a level of success many of us aspire to. Thanks to their determination and ability to seize opportunity, take risks and overcome obstacles, they are achieving their dreams.

Our publication profiles seven women behind some of Manitoba’s most successful companies. We hope their stories will unite women looking to enter the business world, and those who have successfully conquered it. By acknowledging the achievements of successful women today, we hope to inspire the women of tomorrow. I would like to thank the Women’s Enterprise Centre of Manitoba for their contributions to this publication, for this event, and for their continued efforts to support Manitoba’s women in business.

Please join me as we celebrate the ingenuity and achievements of Manitoba women in business.

Jennifer Howard
Minister responsible for the Status of Women
CYNTHIA BRICK  
CO-OWNER, BRICK’S FINE FURNITURE

Cynthia Brick is a successful entrepreneur and an inspirational business leader in her community. She founded Brick’s Fine Furniture forty-two years ago with her husband and has turned the modest enterprise into a strong anchor store in downtown Winnipeg with a solid reputation for providing impeccable service. Her company’s success story is one of stellar leadership, ethical business practices and community service. Cynthia began her business to provide for her family. The setting allowed her to bring her small children to work – at a time when it was not the norm. Through the company’s struggles in its early years, Cynthia learned to embrace challenges and learn from them. Dealing with situations like early financing problems and changes in location, Cynthia has spent a lifetime working to keep her business strong.

In a case that went to the Federal Court of Canada, the Bricks successfully beat back a challenge by a national chain to the use of their own family name. The five-year lawsuit ended with an agreement that the two companies could exist -- and a large legal bill. Yet, the business was able to recover and thrive. Always committed to the belief that the best product an ethical business leader can have is one’s good name, Cynthia also believes in, and has seen the results of, the power of determination.

She describes her entrepreneurial path as colourful, adventurous and challenging. She would advise other women who want to start their own businesses to make the tough decisions and the courage to see them through until it works. She sees mistakes as an opportunity for further growth. Her greatest role model in both life and business has been her father. He not only taught her the skills essential for business, but also the importance of saving, a lesson she’s passed on to her five grown children.

Committed to giving back to her local community, Cynthia sits on the board for the Prairie Action Foundation and also fundraises for her local Rotary Club. She is also active in her Homeowner’s Association and a member of the Manitoba Club.

CELESTE BRUNEL  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND OWNER, CELESTIAL DESIGNS INC.

Celeste Brunel, founder and chief executive officer of Celestial Designs Inc., credits her photographic, eco-friendly artwork to her background as an interior designer.

Her work, which she describes as abstract, contemporary and carefully crafted, is available at all 34 Urban Barn stores in Canada. It was also recently featured at the Umbra Concept Store and on HGTV. Thanks to Celeste’s exceptional skills at promoting her products, they are now in demand internationally and are continually featured in the media, movies and television. Most recently, her Eco Art was part of the premium gift suite at the Golden Globe Awards in Los Angeles, California. Selected products were also showcased at the 2011 Emmy Awards, and in a celebrity endorsement beach house in Malibu.

Celeste studied at the University of Manitoba and the Peter Behrens School of Architecture in Germany, where she obtained a degree in environmental design and, later, a master’s degree in interior design. In 2003, she received the Entrepreneurial Excellence Award from the Asper Center for Entrepreneurship. Most recently, the prolific artist received recognition from the Future Leaders of Manitoba in the arts category.

Celeste is passionate about her work and values the independence that entrepreneurship has afforded her. She places great value on being able to work creatively each day on her own terms. Celeste encourages other young women to start on their own entrepreneurial paths. Her advice to them is to start slow, follow their intuition and build networks by reaching out to others.

For the past couple years, Celeste has travelled extensively promoting her work, but always enjoys returning home to Manitoba. She feels a deep attachment to her rural roots and to her family farm in Ste. Rose du Lac. A valued volunteer at Winnipeg’s Art City, Celeste continues to contribute to the richness of community life in Manitoba.
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She describes her entrepreneurial path as colourful, adventurous and challenging. She would advise other women to be proactive, persistent and passionate, and to be patient and understanding of the fact that failure is just another stage on the road to success. The best product an ethical business leader can have is one’s good name, Cynthia also believes, and has seen the results of stellar leadership, ethical business practices and community service.

Cynthia Brick is a successful entrepreneur and an inspirational business leader in her community. She founded Brick’s in downtown Winnipeg with a solid reputation for providing impeccable service. Her company’s success story is one of determination, hard work, and an understanding of the importance of giving back to the community.

She is active in various events with the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Winnipeg, the Winnipeg Assiniboine Park Conservancy. She is also a founding member of the Women of Winnipeg Foundation, where she has given a lifetime of service.

CHRISTINE DUBYTS
PRESIDENT AND OWNER, DUBYTS COMMUNICATIONS INC. AND EDITOR, WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS TODAY MAGAZINE

Christine Dubyts is the president and owner of the Winnipeg-based company Dubyts Communications Inc. Her firm develops marketing strategies, PR programs and ad campaigns for small to mid-size companies in Manitoba. After more than 10 years in the corporate marketing arena, Christine launched her own company in 1999 to pursue new challenges and a new direction.

Through hard work and determination, she has managed to maintain a successful career while remaining dedicated to raising her children and being involved in their activities. Christine cites her husband as her greatest influence in business.

Owning and operating her own company for the past 13 years, and launching Women Business Owners Today magazine, has given Christine the opportunity to do meaningful work that helps other women in business grow and prosper. She assists emerging women entrepreneurs, and provides sound advice to other women thinking about starting their own businesses. She encourages women to explore the opportunities, believing it’s possible to achieve that balance between career and personal goals.

She takes pride in the contribution that being an entrepreneur allows her to make in the community. In her spare time, she makes it a priority to donate her time and expertise to a variety of organizations and causes. She was an active member of the Women Business Owners of Manitoba (WBOM) for seven years, during which time she held the positions of director of marketing, vice president and president. She is currently the past president, treasurer and chair of the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Awards for WBOM. In addition, she volunteers and participates in various events with the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Winnipeg, the Winnipeg International Children’s Festival and, most recently, the Colorectal Society of Canada.
Elba Haid is the president and chief executive officer for Realcare Inc., a privately owned healthcare company she established in 1996. Elba built her business from the ground up within one of Canada’s most challenging business environments. She has been described as an amazing entrepreneur and is credited with creating more than 1250 jobs in the Winnipeg area over the past seventeen years.

Elba demonstrates it’s possible to be a caring mother, supportive wife and successful entrepreneur, who also cares about her community, and is prepared to devote significant time and energy helping others succeed. As a business owner, Elba consistently encourages her employees to grow and prosper within her organization. She has worked to establish a deferred profit-sharing program for her employees, supported the accreditation process for her workers, provided language training and created a work environment where employees know and feel they are valued. As well, she established the Rose Haid Scholarship Fund to help women, such as her employees, pursue careers in nursing.

In recent years, Elba’s demand as a speaker/instructor on business matters has grown. She was the featured speaker for Equinox Insurance Broker’s annual conference and skill-building workshops in Toronto and Winnipeg. She is an exceptional role model for women considering starting their own businesses, as she encourages other women to view themselves as entrepreneurs and to build the networks and skills they will need to succeed.

Elba has a long history of giving back to the community and is particularly passionate about the province’s arts scene. Elba’s business success has given her the opportunity to be an active and generous philanthropist, contributing to many worthwhile causes that include the Manitoba Opera, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and the Manitoba Theatre Centre. She is a former member of the Asper School of Business Associates and has served on the board of Women’s World Finance, the CNIB and the University of Winnipeg’s Global College. She is also chair of the Women of Winnipeg.

Brenda LaRose is the managing partner and founder of Higgins International Inc. Her company has successfully placed more Aboriginal and other ethnically diverse professionals at the board, senior management and executive levels – over a broad range of sectors – than any other firm in Canada. She is a Mètis citizen from Manitoba and an active member of the Manitoba Mètis Federation.

Brenda has more than 25 years experience leading executive search engagements across a wide range of industries and sectors, throughout most regions in Canada and internationally. She is a graduate of the University of Manitoba and has a Certified Human Resource Professional (CHRP) designation, as well as a Certified Management Consultant (CMC) designation.

Brenda became an entrepreneur after many years of working for and managing other recruiting, staffing and executive-search firms in Calgary, Oakville and Winnipeg. Looking back, it seems like a natural progression for Brenda, but she says in the beginning, she hadn’t consciously planned to start her own business. But over time, she found working for others often didn’t allow her to have the final say on projects, or be innovative in ways that would greatly benefit both the company and the client’s organization.

Brenda loves being an entrepreneur and being in control of her own destiny. She advises other women starting businesses to work with organizations that have similar values and a high level of integrity. As an Aboriginal woman in business, she values being a positive role model for younger women who want to go into business for themselves. She believes that with clear and focused goals, women can achieve great results.

With her busy travel schedule, it can be challenging to be involved in the community, but she has always found time to give back. She currently sits on the Board of Trustees of the Seven Oaks Hospital, the national board for the Dreamcatcher Foundation and is a new founding member of the national Canadian Aboriginal Human Resource Management Association, based in Winnipeg. She is also the proud mother of five grown children.
Pat Turner is a respected Manitoba entrepreneur, community leader and exemplary role model. She owns and operates a group of companies from her home community of Grand Rapids. She has worked hard, proven herself, and, in turn, opened the doors for others to enter her industry.

It has been well over 20 years since she began on her entrepreneurial path. From its humble beginnings, Grand Rapids-based trucking company E.T. Development has diversified and grown into one of Manitoba’s premier construction companies, and a thriving business in the North. Pat is no stranger to the hard work it takes to run a successful business. In fact, most of her companies’ successes over the past two decades can be attributed to her leadership.

Pat admits that, over the years, being a woman in the male-dominated construction business has sometimes been a challenge. Today, she enjoys seeing other women own, operate and thrive in the construction industry. Having gained much insight from her personal and professional life experiences, she started providing guidance and support to other women and quickly became a role model for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Pat’s advice to other women entrepreneurs is to listen to their gut feelings, and not to be afraid to talk or ask others for help. She insists there are many people who want to share their expertise, and she feels that this is one of the greatest things we can leave behind for others.

Pat’s exemplary career has not gone unnoticed. In 2005, she was nominated for Manitoba Woman Entrepreneur of the Year. As well, her company was crowned Business of the Year at the 2006 Navigating the Road to Success Business Gala Awards. Pat is also committed to helping organizations that are important to her. In 2004, she co-founded Manitoba’s Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce and served as the first interim president. She is also chair of the First Peoples Economic Development Fund and a board member of the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association.
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MINISTER’S MESSAGE

Minister responsible for the Status of Women

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