



Photo by: Kelly Loucks Wilson, KriZma Photography

2008-2009 AWE BOARD OF DIRECTORS Front row from left: President Kim Schwamberger of Finishing Touches by Kim, Vice President Beverly Mapes of Top of the List, Marketing Chair Connie Sweet, Connection Graphics, Programs Chair Floriza Genautis, Management Business Solutions, Treasurer Kathy Heintzelman, Heintzelman Accounting Services, Inc. Back Row from left: Membership Chair Suzanne Knight, 1-2-1 Personal Computer Training and Secretary Deanna Fridley, Crosby and Henry Insurance

West Michigan Women Entrepreneurs – AWEsome

by Elaine Eldridge
www.yourwordswork.com

AWE members mean business! In a June survey of the Alliance of Women Entrepreneurs over 90 percent of the respondents cited “networking and gaining business contacts” as their main reason for membership. In fact, that was the main reason for the first AWE meeting in 1984, when Grand Rapids women business owners gathered at a woman-owned restaurant to create a network of businesswomen who shared common aspirations, interests, and needs. Today, AWE’s mission is to be the premier organization promoting the success of women entrepreneurs through networking connections, educational resources, and leadership development.

The businesses represented in this organization range from sole proprietorships with fewer than five employees to corporations with over 100 employees; from service providers to manufacturing and construction companies; and from revenues under \$50,000 to sales exceeding \$5 million.

AWE’s new Board of Directors has already implemented several changes in response to survey comments. Almost half the members asked for an alternative to the traditional dinner meetings, so this year will feature both dinners and AWEsome Hour Networking. Meetings are always the third Monday of the month from 5:30–7:30 p.m., but locations will vary so members can try new places while networking. The line-up includes Naya Bistro and Wine Bar, Louis Benton Steak House, and the JW Marriott. First up is Naya on Monday, August 18. After August is Thousand Oaks Golf Club (September 15) and Malarky’s on the East Beltline (October 20). The popular Women in Networking (WIN) lunch program will continue in 2008–09 with a new location. AWE members and guests will meet every fourth Monday from 11:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m. at the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan (located at 20 Hall Street SE on the corner of Hall and Division). Each WIN meeting offers a speaker and time to network as well as eat. This month’s WIN lunch on August 25 fea-

tures Chris Frederick Willis, owner and CEO of award-winning Media 1. Willis will speak on how entrepreneurs can tap into their creative side and apply their creativity in their businesses. September 22 will be led by Renwick Brutus, owner of Achievement Resources, an executive management company. Renwick will present a motivational program to inspire business owners to triumph over adversity. In addition to the regular monthly meetings, two

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major annual events showcase AWE’s commitment to women entrepreneurs in West Michigan. Pathways to Success, AWE’s annual January conference, offers speakers and workshops on marketing, public relations, tax law, and business growth and leadership.

The January 2009 Pathways to Success conference will celebrate AWE’s 25th anniversary with a focus on change. New this year will be special attention to the needs of second-stage business owners as they guide their business past the start-up phase. Breakout sessions will include the effects of today’s technology on business, the benefits of becoming a certified Michigan Woman-owned Business Enterprise, and goal-directed networking. “We don’t think learning and business should be boring,” says Floriza Genautis, AWE Program Coordinator and owner of Management Business Solutions. “AWE members are serious about growing their businesses, but we like to have fun, too.” The second annual event, AWE’s November membership drive, also puts this philosophy to work. Members are encouraged to bring guests to enjoy dinner and a program highlighting members’ achievements and how AWE promotes the success of local businesswomen. Interested, but don’t know an AWE member? “No problem,” says Connie Sweet, owner of Connection Graphics and AWE’s Marketing Coordinator. “The membership dinner is a great way to meet lots of established and prospective members. Come alone or, if you’d like to attend with someone, give us a call (616-719-5382) and we’ll match you with an interested member.”

Partnerships with local organizations extend AWE’s

ability to promote member businesses. A major benefit of AWE membership includes a \$100 discount on standard dues from the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce.

AWE’s membership in the Regional Alliance for Diversity in Public Purchasing expands the network of women and minority-owned businesses that provide goods and services for public institutions. AWE members can also participate in the Michigan Women’s Marketplace, which provides business opportunities through an online directory that lists woman-owned businesses in all industries throughout the state.

AWE membership is open all to business owners and professionals who support AWE’s goals and promote and support women business owners and professionals in Grand Rapids. AWE President Kim Schwamberger, owner of Finishing Touches by Kim, encourages curious visitors. “Come see what AWE is like. People are welcome to attend events before they join, and members can always bring guests.”

Registration and prepayment are required for most events. Check out AWE at www.awe-westmichigan.org.

