

COLUMN: THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

Women don't have it easy when it comes to juggling career and family. I can count on one hand the women I know who have been able to accomplish this task seamlessly from the birth of their children to high school graduation.

I left the workplace after my third child was born and, when it came time for me to return, the landscape had changed dramatically. My degree in computer applications—based on mainframe architecture—was obsolete. I had to redefine who I was and what I wanted to do, which for me meant going back to school to get another degree in a completely different field.

But not everyone chooses to go back to school—some have chosen the brave path to entrepreneurship. A road paved with very exciting, yet quite terrifying, tasks.

Starting your own business can be daunting and can also create feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, but not if you find the right people to lend support.



Maria Valente, owner of Chocolations and member of WEN.



The WEN group in mid-discussion. Photos/Lisa Jardine

Luckily for the women entrepreneurs in Westchester County, they have WEN, Women Entrepreneur's Network, a group founded in Mamaroneck in 2010 by Susan Danziger, now headed-up by Kathy Perkal.

"I started the group to gather women entrepreneurs and business leaders so we could inspire each other, share stories, learn from experts through the monthly speaker series, and cheer each other on," Danziger said. "I'm thrilled that Kathy and the others have taken the help and that the group continues to grow."

WEN currently has 68 members and meets on the first Friday of every month at Chocolations, 607 E. Boston Post Road in Mamaroneck, a chocolate factory with an open kitchen. Owner Maria Valente is also a member of WEN. She provides coffee, tea and delicious baked goods for each meeting and the organization asks each member for a \$5 donation to cover the costs. The meetings are held in her very cozy, inviting space, which happens to smell divine as well. There are almost always set topics with coordinated speakers and the meetings last for about 90 minutes.

"WEN provides speakers and networking opportunities to female community entrepreneurs.

Sharing resources and business ideas in a relaxed and supportive setting makes us all better at what we do," Perkal said. She's the founder of Cartoon Cuts, a 17-store chain of children's hair salons she started in 1991.

This is a very talented and diverse group of women.

Carol Wolfe, the owner of CSJ Consultants, is a computer technician working in homes and small businesses across Westchester County and surrounding areas. Her services run the gamut from Wi-Fi and syncing issues to data backup and recovery, to data transfer and organization of



Chocolations in Mamaroneck, the meet up spot for WEN.

files and will even give you hands-on how-to lessons.

"I've been attending the WEN meetings for several years now. I started my business five years ago and am always seeking new ideas on how to expand and better promote my business," Wolfe said. "The speakers Kathy has organized have been excellent, as [have] been the discussions that follow. What I have learned from this group of women has been critical to the success and growth of my business as I try and push forward and maximize the number of clients I service in the area."

Maria Genovesi, principal of MCG Communications, an integrated marketing and promotional consulting company specializing in consumer media, had this to say about WEN.

"WEN has been a wonderful experience," Genovesi said. "The group is filled with smart, creative and supportive women. Through the years, I've been both inspired and energized following each of our meetings."

Avra Blieden recently expanded The Yoga Sanctuary, 951 E. Boston Post Road in Mamaroneck, to include the Sanctuary Boutique, a retail space for yoga, holistic and wellness accessories with a focus on environmentally conscientious, fair trade and locally crafted products from companies that support a variety of charities. The store's products include funky yoga shirts, mats and handmade jewelry.

"Meeting with the Women's Entrepreneurial Network was a motivating experience. I was inspired to hear a variety of local women speak about the challenges involved in building their own businesses," Blieden said. "I would recommend other women entrepreneurs to attend these meetings to get concrete advice and expand their contacts through networking."

Elizabeth Dowling runs Sweet Marketing Associates, a boutique marketing consulting firm. She also blogs at www.thewryhome.com.

"The WEN has helped my business grow and increased its overall awareness in Westchester County," Dowling said. "I think having your own business can sometimes be challenging and WEN is a great support network for women entrepreneurs. Not only are there like-minded women in the group, but they also have fabulous speakers each month. I always learn something in the meetings, whether it is the latest trends in social media, business networking tips, how to calculate what to charge clients and so on."

Women's Entrepreneur Network invites women entrepreneurs, in any stage of their business, to join the group and share ideas. If you are interested in joining, or for more information: meetup.com/WEN-Women-Entrepreneurs-Network-Westchester/.

WEN Monthly Meetings

First Friday of each
month at 9 a.m.

Chocolations

607 E. Boston Post Road
in Mamaroneck

"I'm always on the lookout for a great story, an amazing restaurant, an unusual day trip or a must-see cultural event in Westchester County."

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