

Everyone knows about the Good Ol' Boys' Network - it exists in every business community in every state across our wonderful country. Since I'm not a boy (and never have been), personal experience didn't teach me about the inner workings of this ages-old network. Many years of observation, however, tells me that businessmen nationwide banded together to foster the success of their businesses, encourage each other both professionally and personally, and support the community and other worthwhile organizations.

A number of associations and clubs have sprung from this network: Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, Kiwanis, Elks, Moose, etc. We're all familiar with them. But what about the Good Ol' Women's Network?

Well...to be honest...that name has only existed in my mind until now. But it truly expresses the camaraderie of the group, the devotion of its members, and its cohesiveness.

The Missoula Businesswomen's Network (MBN) was founded in 1985 by a group of businesswomen desiring to provide multiple forums for the exchange of ideas, the encouragement of professional and personal development, the creation of public awareness of the diverse contributions of women in the community, and the fostering of interaction between and among women leaders.

Some misconceptions about this organization exist and they range from the belief that MBN is a group consisting exclusively of self-employed women to the conviction that it's simply a social group.

There's nothing simple about MBN. It's a non-profit corporation that supports women, all women, in a multitude of ways. Membership benefits include: networking opportunities several times a month in a choice of forums, member-to-member advertising, mentoring, a monthly newsletter, social and educational events, a web site (www.discovermbn.com), and the opportunity to mentor and support programs of the Missoula YWCA, including its women's shelter.

At last count, MBN's membership exceeded 200 and is comprised of professionals in all walks of life: bankers, doctors, fashion consultants, cosmetologists, real estate brokers, artists, beauty and fashion consultants, accountants, motivational speakers, counselors, writers, life coaches, travel agents, dance and fitness instructors, insurance agents, photographers, massage therapists, attorneys, judges, staffing consultants, financial advisors, web designers, computer consultants, teachers, and tutors. MBN members also work in the following industries: auto sales and service, management and training seminars, community services, conservation,

construction, weight management, assisted living, lawn and tree care, publishing, hospitality, and retail.

The women of MBN are a collection of entrepreneurs, employees, retirees, and yes—even the temporarily unemployed. Some women work full time, others work on a part-time basis. Many devote their time to industries that are considered typically female and still others labor in male-dominated fields. Some are newbies; others possess extensive experience. All are devoted to furthering themselves and supporting other women in business.

Energy levels are high at all gatherings of MBN members; enthusiasm and generosity abound. Donations of door prizes, gift certificates, and free services are commonplace. The organization itself offers a number of scholarships each year: for membership, for attendance at the annual weekend retreat, for both attendance and vendor booths at the annual Women's Symposium, and for women at the local YWCA.

Prospects for advancement, personal growth, and entertainment are endless since MBN holds a minimum of six meetings per month for a multitude of purposes. First, there's the General Meeting, which is a luncheon that draws an average attendance of about eighty. It's held the second Wednesday of each month at the Doubletree Hotel in Missoula. Members have the opportunity to network, distribute marketing and promotional material, listen to guest speakers, and

attend educational programs. Then there are the four sub-network groups, which meet at different locations on a regular basis.

Empowerment meets once a month at a luncheon meeting at the Mustard Seed; *Business Development Skills* meets once a month at a luncheon meeting at the Mustard Seed; *Business Referrals* meets twice each month—once at a luncheon meeting at Jakers and once in the evening at different locations hosted by the sub-network's members; and *Women in Personal Finance* meets in seminar format in the fall and spring at different locations. Each sub-network focuses on an area that the general membership has decided will be a significant resource to its members. Attendance at these events is voluntary and varies from an intimate ten—which is perfect for the one-on-one exchange of information and education—to twenty or more for presentations and networking. And, get this: annual membership dues include attendance at any and all meetings for \$35. Of course, members buy their own lunches, but still, what a bargain!

Once a year, MBN holds a weekend retreat—usually in April—at the Double Arrow Resort in Seeley Lake. A guest speaker provides motivation and inspiration for the gathering; shorter breakout sessions and workshops complete the affair. This event usually draws twenty to thirty participants who truly enjoy the intimate and relaxing atmosphere—not to mention the friendship, excellent food,

and indulgence of a weekend away from the obligations of the business world.

On February 3, 2007, the Hilton Garden Inn will host MBN's second annual Women's Symposium. The first Symposium was a resounding success, drawing 200-plus participants who visited over thirty vendor booths, attended sixteen seminars, and enjoyed a keynote speech during the luncheon. It is expected that the upcoming Symposium will draw 400 participants, provide closer to fifty vendor booths, and offer sixteen new and different workshops. The keynote speaker will be Marcia Wieder, America's Dream Coach.

Leadership of the organization changes on an annual basis, encouraging new insights, perspectives, and potential. *Dare to Dream: Live a Life of Passion and Joy* is MBN's current theme and was chosen by president Deborah Gass. Last year's theme, selected by past-president, Kathy Schulte, was *Imagine the Possibilities*. How can an organization with this much passion and promise not succeed? The Good Ol' Women's Network, like its male counterpart and predecessor, is thriving in Missoula.

Perhaps it's because business is good in our community these days, and getting better because of our tremendous resources, our sense of community and belonging, and the generosity of local business people such as the women of MBN.

Why not check out the Missoula Businesswomen's Network at one of its meetings or contact a member of its Board? The organization always welcomes new members and guest speakers at its monthly general and sub-network meetings. Contact information about MBN, its Board, and sub-network groups is available on their MBN web site: www.discovermbn.com.