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A Group Helps Women Thrive

By: Daniela Forte



From left, members Theresa Mullin, Chana Monahan, Natalie Clark, Jenny Drescher, Pat Shelesky, Pam Sangster and Jackie Kane. Photo by Walter Kidd.

They may have different interests and careers—massage therapy, insurance, beauty care, real estate and more—but the women who make up the Litchfield County Women's Network (LCWN) share at least one commonality, the desire to improve themselves and the world around them through focused camaraderie.

"It's a social network, an opportunity to meet with women in business and to learn more about networking myself," said Theresa Mullin, the public relations chairman for the LCWN.

"I find that it's really rewarding to meet all the different types of women, and they all have such a different outlook on things, and they're in different stages in their lives," said Chana Monahan, president of the organization.

Ms. Monahan, the owner of Greenhouse Graphics, LLC, a graphic and Web site design company in Winsted, said that being part of the organization has allowed her to learn a great deal, while also making her feel that she doesn't have to do it all on her own.

The LCWN was started in 1981 by eight area business women who saw the need for a network of contacts as a way of helping members expand their businesses and careers. In the last 28 years, the organization's niche has been social/business networking.

"They decided, 'We can do this by expanding our business and opportunities by dealing with other women and empowering other business women,'" said Ms. Monahan. "They created the organization to be for professional executive business women and business owners."

The monthly meetings, she said, may feature a business or networking speaker, and if not, LCWN leaders organize business networking activities that allow members to practice the skills they need to succeed in the business world.

"We all practice because we are all very friendly and it's a very comfortable environment, and the practice is among friends, so you can take those lessons and techniques outside," said Ms. Monahan. "During our activities, we try to take things that we learned from our speakers and implement them into a working fashion."

The LCWN meets on the third Wednesday of each month from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., except in August. Meetings are held at various locations in the Litchfield area and often include a combination of dinner, networking and an informative speaker, according to the organization's Web site, www.lcwn.com.

"We meet at different area restaurants; we try to give the restaurants promotion as well, as long as they fit our needs," said Ms. Monahan. The LCWN will stick with a restaurant for two or three months so that the restaurant becomes familiar with the organization and benefits from an influx of customers over a sustained period.

"Once a month for the three months, we allow [the restaurant] the ability to put an ad on our Web site or in the newsletter, so we're really trying to help them out that way," said Ms. Monahan.

At each meeting, members are given a topic to work on that will help them for both business and their personal lives. Ms. Monahan explained that one topic was 30-second introductions.

There are currently about 50 members who are part of the organization, and in past years the LCWN has had up to 200 members.

"It's the whole Litchfield County, our members are primarily right in the Torrington, Winsted area, though we do have some in Salisbury and all the way down to Watertown, Thomaston," said Ms. Monahan. "We are looking to definitely broaden that."

In April, the organization will have a daughter's day event at which members, as well as any mentors, gather between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. and work with eighth-grade girls in the Torrington public schools, addressing such issues as life and career choices.

"The girls love it, even though LCWN puts it on, it's a total separate entity from LCWN," said Ms. Monahan. "Women don't have to be a member to come to mentor the girls."

The group's Web site is also a valuable tool for members of LCWN, as it offers resources, links and referrals. Members are allowed to submit for posting a Web site or books that they find helpful to them, both business and personal.

"We try to encourage the members to share their resources," said Ms. Monahan.

There are currently eight board members, and in addition to being the president, Ms. Monahan has also been the LCWN Web site designer.

"After six years, I know all the people and everybody knows me—I'm the communication person, always have been, and it just seemed like a logical next step to be president," said Ms. Monahan. "It's been amazingly rewarding and the support for me being president has been overwhelming."

In a challenging economy, the organization assists its members by offering a member-to-member announcement that goes out monthly and includes job listings along with messages from those seeking jobs.

"Members really truly respond; they will ask members first. It's amazing how many contacts your members have," said Ms. Monahan.

LCWN also encourages its members to be community- and charity-minded. The organization will highlight charities that members may get involved with. "In the business sense, we're helpful. We also try to encourage the community growth—being part of the community will help their business as well," said Ms. Monahan.

Each month the organization has a scholarship raffle in which members, guests and speakers can bring a donated gift or item and those at the meeting buy raffle tickets.

Every June, the organization gives two \$500 scholarships to women who are going back to school to further their education or change careers. Applications go out each April.

The annual membership fee is \$40, and an optional online business listing costs another \$10 for the year. Monthly meetings that include dinner are \$25; \$35 for guests.