

STRIVING FOR SUCCESS

Portland business owners want to share ideas with others

by Tom Stevenson

Deborah Stopper has learned a great deal in her 20 years of sales. Yet she is one of those people who realizes she still has a great deal of new and exciting things to learn from others in the business world.

She thinks most people in business, at one time or another, face many of the same issues. She also is a strong believer that when people share their goals with one another, it is easier to stay focused.

That is one of the reasons she and her friend Janet Borisch-Smith are in the process of organizing a new, yet unnamed, networking and support group for gay and lesbian business owners in the Portland area. The meetings will offer a safe spot for people to share ideas, concerns, experiences, needs, goals and just about anything else related to business.

Stopper says the group's main focus will be "having shoulders to lean on, to keep each other focused and on track, to meet the goals we want to achieve, to learn from one another...an exchange of knowledge."

Stopper is no stranger to Portland. She was born in the community and has spent her entire life here.

In fact, she says her great-grandfather built the first car in Portland. "My family has been here a long time."

Stopper brings a wide variety of career experience to the table.

"I started in door-to-door sales and worked my way through inside sales, retail sales, wholesale sales and service sales," she says. "I owned my own house/office cleaning company for about five years. I also spent five years working in a factory and was the chief shop steward for the union. I have had a very diverse background that has given me a lot of knowledge in the area of life."

Today, Stopper and her partner, Katherine Corder, own and operate an independent insurance agency, Options Northwest. Stopper is responsible for the sales end of the business, while Corder handles all of the paperwork and high-tech computer work.

"We are an independent agency and sell mostly group and individual health insurance," Stopper says. "We also have dental, life, disability, long-term care and critical care insurance." The two have been involved in the insurance business for the past three years.

The Portland Area Business Association already focuses on the gay and lesbian business community. Although Stopper says PABA and groups like it are "great for meeting a large number of people and serve as a good place to get current events," she has different goals in mind.

"It has been my experience that as a small-business owner, I need something a little more personal," Stopper says. "Janet and I have been supporting each other in our business needs for a while now, and it works to say our goals out



Deborah Stopper (left) and Katherine Corder


loud to someone and be held accountable."

Stopper says she and Borisch-Smith help each other with specific business items, like advertising, but are also there with strong personal support. Borisch-Smith does personal coaching and teaches workshops in relationships, parenting and death.

"We support one another at staying motivated and on track," Stopper says. "We thought it would be great to expand and extend this kind of support to others and at the same time get fresh ideas and input from them."

The organizers of the new group welcome anyone in business. The world of business constantly is changing, and the exchange of ideas is often key to the success or failure of any enterprise. Ultimately, Stopper and Borisch-Smith hope to develop a strong core group of people who will gather on a regular basis to support one another in not only achieving their goals but finding all types of success along the way.

Stopper notes that although she and Borisch-Smith would like to meet twice a month, they are more than willing to listen to suggestions from people who join the group. "It's something we can decide together," she says.

Anyone who is interested in participating is encouraged to attend the next meeting 7:30 a.m. Jan. 8 at a location to be announced. Call 503-492-4148 or send e-mail to stopper@prodigy.net for more information. 

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