



Minnesota SBA Honors Women in Business Champion

DULUTH – Elaine S. Hansen, Director, University of Minnesota (UMD) Center for Economic Development, has been named the Women in Business Champion of the Year for the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Minnesota District Office. The UMD Center for Economic Development is the Small Business Development Center in Northeastern Minnesota serving St. Louis, Carlton, Lake, Cook, Koochiching, and Itasca Counties.

The Women in Business Champion is selected annually to honor individuals who have fulfilled a commitment to the advancement of women’s business ownership. Richard E. Braun, Assistant Director of the UMD Center for Economic Development, nominated Hansen for this award.

Since 2003, Elaine Hansen has served as the Director for the UMD Center for Economic Development and the Regional Director for the NE Minnesota Small Business Development Center (SBDC). She is also a certified public accountant (CPA) license in the State of Minnesota and in 2003, completed her Master’s of Business Administration (MBA) degree from the University of Minnesota Duluth. She has had extensive experience in the public and private sectors working with businesses of various sizes, and had continually worked to promote women in business and women in non-traditional careers.

In the Fall of 1992, Elaine and a friend developed the Professional Women’s Network (PWN). The mission of the PWN is mentoring, networking, and sharing information. The network has grown over the past 15 years, one woman at a time. Each year the PWN bring together between 300 and 400 women to network and share information. Each monthly meeting is currently attended by 50 to 70 women.

Over the years, many of the women have made ongoing friendships, mentored each other on business issues, shared information on their businesses, found resources to continue or expand their business, gained encouragement and support through difficult times, and found business and employment opportunities.

The survival of the organization is amazing since it is an all-volunteer organization, with little structure. Realizing that women are very busy and have multiple roles in their lives, there are no attendance requirements and leadership roles are voluntary and continue indefinitely, or until

someone steps into the role. Besides being the co-founder, Elaine has provided continuing leadership and has served as the Chair and treasurer for the past 8 years. While many other business-related organizations are struggling to survive, this one is thriving. Without Elaine's interest and continuing involvement, this organization would more than likely not continue to be able to provide the ongoing support that it does for women in business.

Additionally, Elaine has been a frequent speaker in secondary and post-secondary schools on topics of women in non-traditional careers, financial management, and entrepreneurship. She is also known for being a one-person resource and referral network for people looking for information, and resources for the business or career.

For more information:

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