



Local Matters.

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Lending a helping hand

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Published: 09.09.08

Grandmother Sandy Garvey is not the typical handyman. But for Garvey, the term is a perfect fit.

"Other business owners find it unique, being that it's more of a man's business," the Littleton resident said. "But you have to realize, this is service. "(This business) is really problem-solving day-to-day. And women are great problem solvers. That's why I love this."

Handyman Matters — a franchise operated out of Littleton for almost eight years — is an all-purpose remodeling and repair company serving residential and commercial customers.

Garvey takes care of office matters and is considered the owner of the company — even employing her husband—who takes care of the company's finances. However, the managerial agreement is not one often brought up at the dinner table.

"We really support one another," she said with a smile.

Garvey admits she has been lucky in getting her business off the ground, having her husband for both business and emotional support.

That has not been the case for many women entering the still male-dominated entrepreneurial world.

Nell Merlino found herself in this latter position about 10 years ago, when she started her own small business.

"I got kind of stuck and realized there must be other women like me," Merlino said. "I learned very quickly that women with businesses really needed help. There was help out there to get started, but there wasn't much help once you got started."

That's when she founded Count Me In, a national not-for-profit dedicated to helping women build their small businesses into million-dollar companies.

Female entrepreneurs are invited to apply for assistance from Count Me In, entering a pool from which 20 finalists are chosen each year. Applicants present their businesses to a panel — after some coaching from Count Me In — who evaluate their potential of becoming million dollar companies. Ten winners receive coaching and mentoring services for one year, along with discounts from companies like Dell, FedEx and Jet Blue Airways.

So far, 25 percent of the companies "counted in" have reached the \$1 million goal.

Only 2.6 percent of female business owners in this country have hit that mark, compared to 6.7



Sandy Garvey owns and runs Handyman Matters in Littleton and said the business was a perfect fit for her.

percent of male entrepreneurs.

Catching Up

Forty-two percent of all private businesses in Colorado are owned by women, that number having risen by almost 33 percent between 1997 and 2006. Nationwide, Colorado ranks 15th in women-owned businesses.

That's quite a change, considering until a few decades ago, the standard procedure for entrepreneurial women was to have a husband or father take care of the legalities and loans for them. According to Merlino, this was based on the assumption that when all is said and done, women aren't risk-takers.

"What they always said is women were risk adverse, and that's why their businesses weren't successful," Merlino said.

Garvey certainly does not fall in to this category. Before Handyman Matters, she started several other companies, including selling air purifiers and natural foods. In the end, they weren't the right match for this born problem-solver.

"Your hobbies are not necessarily your passion," Garvey said. "I think this is the best fit for me."

Like Garvey, Merlino is seeing women find their best fit in industries previously dominated by men.

Merlino said when she started Count Me In, she expected to see a lot of clothing companies and child care facilities. The reality is an influx of women in to virtually all areas of work and commerce.

"Any kind of business you can think of, there are women. We see women in software and construction and accounting," Merlino said. "There's a lot of problem solving, in terms of designing and creating products and services for things they couldn't find."

At a glance:

Group assists women in business

Female-owned companies on rise

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