

NEW Pioneers

STORIES OF 100 BC WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS



Foreword by Premier Gordon Campbell

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*It's your business.
Start. Grow. Succeed.*

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Acknowledgements

On behalf of Women's Enterprise Centre, I would like to acknowledge the many people and organizations involved in this project.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of: Western Economic Diversification Canada, BC Ministry of Small Business and Revenue, BDC, Black Press, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, and the assistance of the British Columbia Museums Association.

I would like to thank the Women's Business Networks throughout the province, many of which are featured in this book, for their support and mentoring of women entrepreneurs in their communities.

Thank you also to the writers and editors: Sara Couper, Billie Dobbs, Jane Eamon, Kathy Fahey, Tracey Frederickson, Darcy Nybo, Dawn Renaud, and Marilyn Strong. Thank you to Andrea Lindal who produced the book, with design assistance from Madhouse Creative

Inc. We owe a big debt of gratitude to Marilyn Strong, a pioneer in her own right. She was the project manager on this ambitious initiative, who outdid herself this time!

I would also like to acknowledge two tireless champions of small business in BC: the former Minister of Small Business and Revenue, Rick Thorpe, and the former Minister of Community Services, Ida Chong. Your vision and efforts have made the province stronger and more vibrant economically. Your active support of Women's Enterprise Centre initiatives to assist women business owners in BC over the last several years has helped to change people's lives for the better, as evidenced in many of the stories featured in this book.

The final acknowledgement must go to the New Pioneers themselves, whose tenacity, courage and fortitude motivated us to create this compendium of women entrepreneurs. I hope it inspires you as much as creating this book has inspired us!



Laurel Douglas, CEO
Women's Enterprise Centre
September 1, 2008

Foreword

As British Columbia celebrates its 150th anniversary, there is no better time to recognize the critical role women entrepreneurs have played in building the province we live in today.

Since 1995, Women's Enterprise Centre has been helping women start, grow and succeed in business by providing advice and loans, training and mentors. Small businesses are the most important component of BC's economy, with companies with fewer than 50 employees representing 98 per cent of all businesses in British Columbia and creating over one million jobs. Moreover, almost 36 per cent of BC's small business owners are women.

The face of BC business is as diverse as its geography. No two stories are alike. These women range in age from under 25 to over 75, and come from all regions of the province and from a huge range of cultural and economic backgrounds including First Nations.

Whatever their background, they are all New Pioneers of BC business. They have demonstrated the passion and commitment needed to give effect to ideas, and turn those ideas into viable businesses. From birch bark biting to broadcasting, from seafood marketing to encryption software, these women have proven themselves as visionaries

and critical thinkers, risk-takers and organizers.

The women featured in this book have risen to the challenges of entrepreneurship and business management. Each one is an inspiration, whose individual story has made an important contribution to the ongoing story of British Columbia.

“The women featured in this book have risen to the challenges of entrepreneurship...”



Gordon Campbell, Premier
Province of British Columbia
September 1, 2008

Elena Rivera MacGregor

RIVERA DESIGN GROUP LTD.

204 910 RICHARDS STREET, VANCOUVER, BC

604.687.4420 | www.riveradesign.com

When Elena Rivera MacGregor created Rivera Design she decided it would differ from the typical graphic design house. “We don’t just do great design for our clients; we create connections. It’s those connections that make a sale and grow a business. It’s about creating business strategies and how web and graphic design support business growth,” Elena says.

Elena has a diploma in fine arts with a major in graphic design. Her father was a successful entrepreneur so she understood that way of life and never had any fear of going out to work on her own. She started her own company in 1991, slowly. Her first client was referred to her from a former boss. Then there were two projects and Elena was able to pay the rent and save a bit. “Eventually you don’t have to inch away at it,” she says.

“My life used to be pretty chaotic at the beginning of the business,” Elena recalls. “At first you have to grow and you have to do everything. When you break through to the next level you can actually get more people involved, hire employees and become more organized. Then you finally reach the final level where you own the business and the business doesn’t own you.”

“You need to have a network around you to help you,” says Elena. “Find people you can ask questions of. The more mentors and resources you have around you the easier it is to weather owning a business.”

Rivera Design Group Ltd. won the national Vancouver 2010 Olympic Emblem Design Competition. Elena is recognized on an international level, as a leader in her industry. She has been invited to speak to a variety of audiences including a design conference in Mexico. “I was mingling and networking with top graphic designers from around the world,” she says.

“It’s been quite the journey since the days when my primary goal was to pay the rent,” says Elena. “My life is happy and balanced. I’ve put in my time and now I get to reap the benefits.”

*“I started by just paying my rent—
doing one project at a time.”*



Elizabeth Soergel

“The more mentors and resources you have around you the easier it is to weather owning a business”

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About Women's Enterprise Centre

Women's Enterprise Centre is BC's leading resource for women who are starting, purchasing or growing a small business. Established in 1995, we receive core funding from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), and project support from the Province of BC.

With offices and business advisors in Kelowna, Vancouver and Victoria, we provide essential resources and services designed to build business capacity and fuel success. Our professional team understands and relates to the unique circumstances of women business owners, providing tools and confidence through a supportive, individual and practical approach.

Women's Enterprise Centre has contributed to the growth and success of BC women entrepreneurs and we have responded to more than 60,000 inquiries for business information since 1995. Women's Enterprise Centre provides 'real-world' skills development in a number of essential subject areas required to run a strong business, in a variety of formats essential to business success including marketing, finance and strategic planning. Since our inception, over 15,000 clients have received training in more than 1,200 training sessions and our four Learning Guides cover the core skills and activities needed to make business a success.

Our complimentary Resource Guides help women start or grow their business or transition to self-employment by learning from the experience and stories of other women entrepreneurs.

Our unique business lending program combines loans of up to \$100,000 for new and existing businesses with ongoing, complimentary business counselling and advice. Over \$25 million in direct and leveraged financing has created over \$500 million in economic activity in the province since 1995. While only 35 per cent of entrepreneurs still are in business after five years, 73 per cent of Women's Enterprise loan clients are still in business after five years, a true measure of success for us.

We also provide complimentary professional guidance to help women address their business challenges and develop their start-up and growth strategies. Our business advisors provide individual business owners with professional, complimentary business counselling support, resources and referrals to other business service providers. In addition we manage a comprehensive mentoring program, provide research and information on women's entrepreneurship and we host networking and peer learning opportunities.

This unique combination of skills development, empowerment lending and professional guidance program have positioned us as the premier resource for BC women who want to gain the essential tools they need to succeed in business. We have developed a strong reputation as a quality service provider for both start-up and established businesses. Through our various initiatives, we have also developed a comprehensive community-based referral and service delivery network.

The challenges that women in business face in rural communities are often greater than in urban communities. Business infrastructures and resources within these communities are less developed and attitudinal barriers towards women in business are more acute. With fewer networking opportunities, feelings of isolation are more common for women entrepreneurs in these communities. Women's Enterprise Centre is able to fill the gaps across the province, in partnership with Women's Business Networks and other business service organizations.

For more information about Women's Enterprise Centre, our programs, training and events, please visit us at womensenterprise.ca



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