

calling all women

It's been said that well-behaved women rarely make history. But this Sarasota networking group is proving that well-organized women sure do.



Sarasota-based web designer Elsie Gilmore knows the importance of networking. The entrepreneurial owner of True Green Studios had been a member of the creative women's coalition, Veronica Tart (which spawned local success stories such as the Rosemary Rising event and the Atomic Holiday Bazaar). She saw how members were able to share ideas, form business

relationships and rally support. But she also saw an opportunity for improvement.

"A lot of wonderful things came out of Veronica Tart, but it never grew," she explains. "I could see the value of women getting together to network and share ideas."

So when the group disbanded, Gilmore took the successful components and did a little reformulating. "In August, I decided to

Elise Gilmore *(left)*

Laura Daniel Gale *(right)*

open [a creative networking opportunity] up to everyone and see what happened. Fifty-three women showed up at the first gathering, so I knew this was something that people wanted.”

She called the new venture Women with Moxie, an homage to women with vigor, pep and courage. To sum it up, these gals have nerve.

Gilmore put her talents to work and created a website where members could register to post a profile and a photo, promoting themselves and their businesses.

Based on the success of her first meeting and of the website, she decided to hold monthly gatherings.

“We don’t want to sound too formal by calling these ‘meetings,’” she explains. “We aren’t a high pressure networking environment. You don’t have to stand up and introduce yourself in front of everyone. It’s more about forming relationships.”

Gilmore also wants to be sure that the word “creative” doesn’t throw potential members off. “I use the word ‘creative,’ but I just mean it’s a creative way to promote your business,” she says, adding that the diverse membership includes realtors, psychiatrists, a woman who sells airplanes, entrepreneurs and a well-known local columnist.

The meetings are what each member makes of them. “When you get here, it’s your ‘job’ to mingle: walk up to someone and introduce yourself,” she says. “But if you don’t feel comfortable doing that, we have other people who are and they will introduce themselves to you.”

That laid-back attitude has paid off. The group now has 220 members, and is growing every month. That’s why Gilmore approached local business owner and Rosemary Rising founder, Laura Daniel Gale.

“After I saw that it was growing exponentially,

I knew that it would benefit me to have another brain involved,” Gilmore says. “Laura’s very conscientious about her own business [everything but the girl, a boutique and gallery in the Rosemary District] and attracting customers. I knew her input would be invaluable, so I asked her to co-host with me.”

Gale, also a past member of Veronica Tart, instantly took to the idea. “Elsie and I had both been in other local networking groups, but Women with Moxie offers something rare,” she says. “It’s a group with no strings attached. It’s easy to get involved in and stay connected through.”

Gale believes the interactive website is key. “Elsie’s Moxie website design is integral to the success of this group,” she says.

Gilmore and Gale have plans to make the group even more successful. “I definitely want to provide more opportunities for people to come together, feel

good and give to a cause,” Gilmore says, adding that at a recent meeting, the group collected canned goods for the Mayors’ Feed the Hungry Program. “And in 2008, I’m hoping to add advertising opportunities on the website and at gatherings.”

Above all, the duo looks forward to forging even stronger bonds with other local businesswomen.

“I think there are a lot of women in Sarasota eager for like-minded, creative women to network with,” says Gale. “Other groups seem to have far too many guidelines to suit most of our busy schedules. Women with Moxie is focused on the social side, offering an ‘organic’ environment for us to network as each sees fit. A once-a-month gathering to have a drink and meet new members suits us all.”

Editor’s Note: Women with Moxie meets every third Wednesday of the month. For a calendar of times and locations, visit www.womenwithmoxie.com

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