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Moxie women thriving in business network

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It all comes down to hanging around with cool women and talking about some great ideas.

Who wouldn't want to do that, I asked myself as I talked to people about the new local women's networking group called Women with Moxie. The word Moxie, on the group's Web site, is defined as vigor, courage, skill and aggressiveness, nerve.

The group, which saw 53 women show up in August for its inaugural meeting, was started by Laura Daniel Gale and Elsie Gilmore, two Sarasota businesswomen. Gale and Gilmore thought bringing women in business together would be all that was needed to create great synergy.

And they were right, to hear them and other members tell it. The group has now ballooned to 299 members and women are thriving in the low pressure networking environment.

"What we offer that is different is a low-key group with social atmosphere and little structure," said Gale, who is the owner of Everything But the Girl, a women's boutique in Sarasota's Rosemary District. "We wanted to be social and network on an organic level."

Even though the idea was to be social, Gilmore said, "it is really full of people excited about their business so they talk about them."

At the third Wednesday of each month mixers held at the Rustic Grill from 7-9 p.m., a cross section of women in business show up to schmooze, have a good time and make business connections. A typical meeting will see artists, shop owners, Realtors, massage therapists and financial advisers.

Vicki Rollo, owner of Hearts Desire, a women's clothing and jewelry boutique and art gallery in Village of the Arts, thinks Women with Moxie is a wonderful way to network.

"We're all business women working together for the betterment of everyone there," she said. "I like that idea." She has drawn customers to her shop and made connections she hopes will extend the exposure to the fashion shows she puts on.

The only structure to the meetings are some brief announcements and introductions. The group's Web site at www.womenwithmoxie.com allows links to members' business Web sites and promotes other events like a Women's Leadership Initiative annual "Heart to Heart Celebration" at the Crosley Mansion and a champagne brunch and fashion show fund-raiser by the local American Business Women's Association.

And the best benefit yet -- membership is free.

Gale and Gilmore hope the group will grow and grow and grow. They'd also like to add more educational benefits for members with classes and seminars and maybe an expo.

"Women have unique challenges that they have to overcome in business," Gilmore said. "Women share more than men so it helps."

Gale says the meetings allow her as a sole proprietor to get feedback and meet other businesswomen in a one-on-one situation.

"I don't have an office full of people to bounce things off of so this gives me a chance to share ideas," she said.

Rollo puts it succinctly, "It's a positive estrogen experience."