

Small business networking group starting in Ontario

By Jason Schultz – Wayne County Mail Reporter – Thursday, March 20, 2008

ONTARIO-Small business owners and entrepreneurs looking for networking opportunities take note: Ontario's best-kept business secret might be right under your nose.

That secret is Network Ontario, a newly-formed networking organization specifically geared to the needs of independent business people in the Wayne County area.

Glen Cone, a financial adviser with AXA and founder of the group, said it appeals to business owners in the area for a number of reasons.

"Self-employed individuals need a format for casual networking," Cone explained. "For people that are their own boss, it is so important to form those professional bonds to further your business, which is what we are aiming to do."

Then there are the advantages of the meeting setup itself; "there's no need to commute to Rochester to meet, there are no membership fees and it's a much more casual and intimate setting to make those connections." Said Cone.

The networking group, which started in January, currently sees five or six local business people joining Cone for an informal meeting over coffee and eggs at Konstantinou's

Restaurant. During the meeting, the group goes over plans to expand membership, find guest speakers to discuss a variety of business topics, and exchange professional contacts.

This week, there were five local business people in attendance, though Cone hopes to eventually see 15 to 25 regulars. Though the meeting was small, the impressions from those that showed up was uniformly positive in their praise for Cone's efforts.

Linda McQueen, president of Business to Best Consulting, is a member of several other business networking groups, but was impressed with her experience with Network Ontario.

"This is my first meeting; I had heard about it through word-of-mouth and decided to check it out," McQueen said. "I really liked the format; it's run like a business meeting, so there's a level of organization that's good to see."

Paul Anken, a loan officer with Indymacbank in Pittsford, agreed with McQueen. "I like the intimate setting: it's like a casual business meeting, in that people come prepared to work toward a goal, but in a relaxing setting."

The biggest reason for joining the network attendees said, was the advantages of forging

professional relationships. Said Anken, "Personal interaction is the best form of advertising." He said. "When you're able to meet face-to-face with someone, it's a very powerful incentive to give them your business."

Network member Kathy Gray explained it was a matter of trust. "People want to know the person they do business with; if I'm looking for an electrician, do I want to go to the Yellow pages, or talk to Wayne Richardson, owner of Richardson Electric and Network Ontario member?, Gray said. "Most people will go with the person they met and can trust."

It is that sense of personal trust and individual attention Cone said he wanted as the cornerstone of this group, and hopes positive word-of-mouth will lead to success in the coming months.

"We're trying to do something a little different here," Said Cone. "By keeping the meeting small, we want to work in a setting most small-business owners find most like the rest of their business-model; face to face, personal and built on honesty and trust."

The group meets the first and third Wednesday of each month at 7:45 a.m. at Konstantinou's Restaurant, 2030 Route 104 at Furnace Road. The meeting runs to 9 a.m. and is free for all attending.

For more information on events, guest speakers and other topics, visit www.networkontario.org.