

Group helps moms in business world

By ERICA VITAL

VIEW STAFF WRITER

Mention the old saying "the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world" to Moms in Business Network president and founder Gina Robison-Billups and she would agree.

Robison-Billups also would tell you that 80 percent of the buying power in the United States is in the hands of women, and about one-third of all small businesses are women-owned, yet those hands rocking the financial and entrepreneurial cradles of the world are often underserved.

"I was conducting seminars and writing a book on money marketing, owning your business and making your dreams come true, when I realized that mom-entrepreneurs had a different set of challenges," Robison-Billups said.

A one-time marketing and entertainment executive, Robison-Billups was surrounded by mom business owners in a coffee- and conversation-filled conference room Jan. 18 at a Moms in Business Network event.

Along with Station Casinos and Hooters Hotel, Nevada Federal Credit Union is a Moms in Business Network sponsor, and the morning networking event was held at its main branch at 2645 Mojave Road.

"So, I decided to create a seminar to market to organizations for moms in business. I started writing the seminar and at the same time I was looking for any organizations out there. There weren't any," Robison-Billups said.

Five years later, with more than 150 local business owners and more than 15,000 national and international members joining from as far away as Germany and the Philippines, Robison-Billups has created the first large network of moms owning or jumping into their own ventures.

"What other major business conference can you go to pushing your baby in a stroller," said Tausha Seymour Scarlett, owner of BounceU, a 10,000-square-foot party and recreation facility at 7340 Smoke Ranch Road.

Scarlett was a panelist in the morning Moms in Business Network event, which featured three successful, franchise-owning moms sharing their experiences, from intimidating franchise fees to business licenses. "This is a phenomenal group of women," she said.

Christina Lerner of CertaPro Painters of Las Vegas, 5087 Arville St., Suite F, one of the few women in the nation to have become a commercial/residential painting franchisee, and Marla Hockfield, director of Abrakadoodle, a home-based business that provides visual arts education and entertainment for youth valleywide, presented the triumphs and the trials of franchise ownership to a room filled with women who were there to receive information and to lend support.

"What we want," said Robison-Billups, "is to create a million millionaire moms by 2015. It doesn't have to be through owning their own businesses. Whether it's through money management, whether it's through working within a corporate business, acting as CEOs of jobs they love and saving their money and budgeting. We can do it."

The more familiar up-from-the-bootstraps stories of entrepreneurial success feature men who walk away from the workforce and risk everything to enter enterprises of their own, according to Robison-Billups. Oftentimes, those stories include the support of a family and of a life partner willing to sacrifice all, she said.

"The family will cut back, mortgage the house. Whatever it takes," Robison-Billups said. "But when a woman decides to take that leap of faith, she sets up her office at the kitchen table. And the family says, 'oh, you're going to start a business at home, good, we don't have to pay for child care. You're here to take care of the kids and the house and the day to day.' But what about the business? There was no information or support for women who were off-ramping from the corporate world and striking out on their own."

The services, information and inspirational quotes and business advice featured on the Moms in Business Network Web site is meant to empower women entrepreneurs, as well as the neighborhoods, schools, communities and families of working women.

The site includes marketplace tips, start-up advice and serves as a hub for local businesses. Recently, Robison-Billups and chief executive officer of Balanced Organizing Solutions and FOX-5 TV personality Brenda Prinzavalli published "The Accomplishment Journal for Moms," a daily planner designed to suit the needs and speed the productivity of busy moms. The journal marks another endeavor on the part of the organization, as the Moms in Business Network has published and promoted the book through its publishing entity, American Working Mom Media. Working toward Robison-Billup's goal of 1 million millionaire moms, the Moms in Business Network has formed the International Association of Working Mothers, a nonprofit organization designed to "educate, support and represent" working mothers on a global level.

Early in the history of the group, Billups-Robison decided fostering the goals of mom business owners would involve financial support when possible. To this end, the group began the Create Your Dreams award, which bestows one business start-up grant and one

business expansion grant to women-owned businesses. The grant awards \$1,000 in cash to help women start a business and \$1,000 in cash to help women expand an existing business. Each grant includes either a Business Start Up membership or Corporate membership, a value of \$9,000 each for winners. Now in its fourth year, the deadline for the 2008 Create Your Dream award is Feb. 28. Applications and grant requirements can be found at www.mibn.org. Winners will be announced May 10 during a gala event at Loew's Resort Hotel at Lake Las Vegas.

The Moms in Business Network will host a Girlfriends' Lunch and networking event at 11:30 a.m. on Feb. 14 at Dan Marino's, 115 E. Tropicana Ave., and will hold the official book release of "The Accomplishment Journal for Moms" from 5 to 7 p.m. on Feb. 28 at Sweet Water Prime Seafood, 9460 S. Eastern Ave. in Henderson. The Moms in Business Network also will host a forum titled Nevada's Education Crisis at 4 p.m. on Feb. 21. For this event location and for more information on the Moms in Business Network, visit www.mibn.org or call (800) 790-6426.