

## **Women add a feminine flair to making connections**

*By Lini S. Kadaba  
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Inside the Ardmore Lilly Pulitzer store on a recent day, women in smart suits bought pink tube tops and color-drenched sundresses. And they exchanged business cards.

After all, that was the ultimate purpose.

The Professional Women's Roundtable had chosen the Suburban Square store as the spot for its members to make connections - of the business kind.

" This is the women's version of the boys' network," said recruiter Sabrina Sacks, 36, head of Sacks Legal Search in Philadelphia and one of 70 women chatting among racks of Palm Beach wear. "This is the girls' network."

The art of building business in recent years has moved beyond the golf course and sports box, the traditional male hangouts to work, or seal, a deal.

The girls' network, here and elsewhere, is being constructed at high teas, beach days, cooking classes and sewing clubs, to name a few. And it should come as no surprise that leading the way off the links are professional women's groups.

" For many women, beers at the bar, seats at the ballgame and golf are not fun," Diane K. Danielson, founder and executive director of Downtown Women's Club, a national network of 5,000-plus women, wrote by e-mail. "So rather than forcing themselves to be comfortable with someone else's idea of networking, women are reinventing networking so that it is comfortable for them."

In the last five years, the Downtown Women's Club's nontraditional events have multiplied. The new Los Angeles chapter made connections - beyond the inner kind - during yoga on the beach; the Boston chapter recently launched a book club (business to chick lit) where networking occurs before an author reading; and "manicures and martinis" is a widespread favorite, wrote Danielson, author of the 2003 *Table Talk: The Savvy Girl's Alternative to Networking*.

Such occasions, besides delivering plain fun, also "build relationships, which is really what generating business starts with. And they build confidence," said lawyer Diane Yu, an administrator at New York University and chairwoman of the American Bar Association's Commission on Women.

In June, Robyn Forman Pollack, 35, a bankruptcy lawyer at Saul Ewing in Center City, networked at the Mid-Atlantic conference of the Turnaround Management Association in Atlantic City - while exposing her toes for a pedicure.

" Women are coming up into positions of power in business," she said. "We don't feel we have to play on the men's terms." Spa day tempted 25 out of 35 female conference goers, Pollack said. It was held opposite a golf outing that hadn't scored with women.

Last year, she started the Networking Organization of Women, affiliated with the Philadelphia chapter of the Turnaround Management Association, after a Union League experience.

" I felt very uncomfortable," she said. "These huge portraits of men are staring down at you. I came back to my colleagues who had encouraged me to go and said, 'I don't know how I'm going to get business. They're going to give it to their 50-year-old bald colleagues.' "

In the fall, the network plans to meet at a fashion show.

The different settings say as much about gender - and generational - differences as it does about the business world.

Many, though not all, of those turning out are Gen Xers, whose oldest members are entering their 40s and sitting in, or vying for, management posts.

Baby-boom women may have taken golf lessons (and suited up like linebackers) to access corporate America, but their daughters have other ideas.

" Our generation is one that says, 'We want to do it all in our own way,' " said work-life consultant Deborah Epstein Henry, 37, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers.

Often, that means savvy businesswomen are embracing a girlish side "as a means to differentiate themselves from men and find solidarity with other professional women," she said. "Times have changed to some degree... . Women may feel more empowered."

Last month, about 50 women mingled at the Bridgette Mayer Gallery in Center City, a Flex-Time Lawyers event.

" I see women being so much more relationship oriented... and men more transaction oriented," said **Kay Keenan**, a marketing strategist with **Growth Consulting** in Wilmington whose article on "**Relationship Building Without Golf**" was posted to the American Bar Association's Web site.

Women often make friends first, then tap them for clients, she said. Men do the opposite, building business contacts first.

Elizabeth Vale, for one, formed a network of 16 friends in diverse leadership posts around the country. Alliance women support each other, both personally and professionally, retreating for a weekend to study a prominent figure or topic, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Picasso or, in the fall, human rights.

" Many of us work almost entirely with men," said Vale, 50, an executive director at Morgan Stanley. "This grew out of this loneliness for women at our level."

Don't throw out the golf balls quite yet, though.

Museum tours, etc., should happen "in addition to what's already out there," said Henry, whose talk on "Beyond Rubber Chicken Dinners" has proven popular lately. "If you preclude yourself from traditional male business development, you're missing something."

The national Commercial Real Estate Women Network, based in Lawrence, Kan., considers golf on par with anything else, said the network's chief executive officer, Linda Hollemon. Still, chapters have hosted sewing circles (Pittsburgh) and wine tasting (Houston). "We have a good balance of it all."

Afterall, the appeal of shopping at Lilly cannot be denied.

" The edge is not there," said Janine DiLauro, 36, an executive at Risk Management Association in Philadelphia and president of the women's roundtable.

Emilia Andrews, 30, a new member who is vice president at Beholder Productions in Jenkintown, moved among aisles of pink and green and women shopping, talking, networking.

" It's not like a normal Chamber thing," she allowed, happily.

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