

Female business leaders begin U.S. trade mission

Trade Minister Sergio Marchi leads an all-woman Team Canada on a Washington trip involving small and medium-size firms.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Bev Durvin represents the next phase of Canada's export market strategy.

The Calgary businesswoman is one of 125 business leaders accompanying Trade Minister Sergio Marchi on a three-day Team Canada trade mission to the Washington area designed to create even greater opportunities for Canadian products in the U.S.

Team Canada trade missions are becoming a routine part of Ottawa's strategy for building an export-oriented economy. What is different about this mission that begins today is its size, the fact that all the participants are heads or executives of small and medium-sized businesses, and that all are women, representing women-owned firms from every province except Prince Edward Island.

"This couldn't have come at a better time for us because we are planning to launch our export plan for the U.S. in February," explains Durvin, who is director of marketing for Flagworks, a small firm with 20 employees and close to \$5 million in sales.

The company, owned by 1995 Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year finalist Arlene Flock, designs and manufactures sweat-shirts, T-shirts and jackets emblazoned with distinctive designs based on national flags.

"For us, the key attraction was that the mission had an export emphasis and that it was made up of businesswomen was an extra comfort level for us," said Durvin.

The mission is almost a perfect fit of mutual interests for the businesswomen and the Canadian government. Both the U.S. and Canada believe a vast trade po-

tential lies in the small and medium-sized firms of both countries.

And as a senior Canadian trade official pointed out, women-led small and medium-sized firms are growing at three or four times the rate of those directed by men. There are currently 700,000 women-led businesses in Canada, accounting for 1.7 million jobs.

At the same time, women business owners are the least likely to have experience marketing their products outside the country.

The trade mission will give the Canadian women an opportunity to learn about customs regulations and market strategies, as well as make contacts with businesses in the Washington region. They'll meet with leaders of 80 regional firms on Friday.

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