

First all-female trade mission to tackle U.S.

Women-led businesses increasingly important to export market, minister says

BY ANDREW DUFFY
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Trade Minister Sergio Marchi will captain the first all-female Team Canada trade mission on a four-day trip to Washington later this year.

The mission, announced yesterday, is aimed at drawing more small- and midsize Canadian businesses — one-third of which are owned by women — into the export market.

The mission is “a way of saying that the world of trade is not necessarily a man’s world” or a world that need be dominated by large companies, Mr. Marchi said.

“This will help women entrepreneurs to reach their export objectives and heighten awareness of their importance to the Canadian economy,” he said.

The mission is expected to attract more than 100 female entrepreneurs who will explore opportunities in the lucrative mid-Atlantic U.S. market.

Currently, only 10 per cent of Canada’s one-million small businesses — the backbone of the nation’s economy — export their goods and services.

Instead, the export market is dominated by a relatively small number of companies: About 50 businesses account for almost half of Canadian exports.

Mr. Marchi has set for Canada the goal of doubling the number of export companies by 2000.

He said female executives must play a major role in achieving that target because their firms are increasingly important ones.

The trade mission to the U.S., Mr. Marchi said, is the beginning of a process designed to highlight the success of women-led businesses in Canada while exposing them to more export opportunities.

“It would seem logical that the American market — which is the biggest, the closest and the most successful — would be a good jumping-off point to bring women entrepreneurs prepared to look at exporting,” he said.

A recent study reported that one-third of the nation’s firms are now owned or operated by women, providing jobs for nearly two million Canadians. The same study found women-led firms are creating jobs at a rate four times the national average. Projections indicate there will be 680,000 self-employed women by 2000.



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Sergio Marchi,
Trade Minister