

# Role players

## Trade mission targets niche companies

### WOMEN

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"I don't have a deal yet," said Garnier, dressed in a two-piece leather suit made from flounder and clutching a matching bag.

"But it's different when you meet people one-on-one. You can follow up."

Les Cuir de la Mer, which employs eight women, is the only enterprise in Quebec to use the skins of salmon, shark, flounder, turbot and cod - formerly discarded material. The skins, which come from factories where fillets are made, are tanned for 10 days and then sewn together into items ranging from \$3 souvenirs to \$200 purses.

Her business, like many led by females, fills a niche in her community and was the kind of company the all-woman trade mission tried to recruit.

On the China mission, only seven of the 141 businesspeople were women. Just 10 per cent of the 360 members of Team Canada's trade mission to south-east Asia in January were women.

In Washington, the story couldn't have been more different.

"The synergy has been fabulous," said Danielle Medina, president of Medina Foods of Montreal and one of nine mentors on the mission. "There's been amazing energy. This is definitely going to boost women's businesses."

During power lunches, power dinners and power breakfasts, women learned how they own or operate 30 per cent of Canadian businesses, how their firms create new jobs four times faster than male-run enterprises and account for 1.7 million jobs in Canada.

Marchi told the women that the government also wanted to learn from the mission - especially how to help female entrepreneurs overcome barriers preventing them from taking part in the more than \$1 billion in trade crossing the Canada-U.S. border every day.

Only 10 per cent of small- and medium-sized companies export, he said. That's why two-thirds of participants on the Team Canada trade mission to South America in January will represent small- and medium-sized firms.

"I'm ready to export now," said Emerance Martin, owner of Quality Fish Murray & Martin Inc. in the Gaspé town of Hopsa.

Martin, 37, said she stopped exporting fish roe to Germany by the barrel in 1991 - "they were selling it back to Canada in bottles" - and for the past five years she has been developing her own product and packaging.

Her product, 50-gram jars of red- and black-lumpfish caviar, retails under the Emerance brand for about \$10. But it is distributed only in Quebec.

That could change soon. In Washington, she met an Ontario businesswoman who has a chain of gourmet food stores, a U.S. catering firm and a major American distributor interested



CHRIS KLEPONIS, AFP

Claudette Garnier wore one of her fish-skin dresses to the Washington seminar for businesswomen.

in her cold-packed product.

"I know you don't make a deal overnight, but I'm feeling pretty good now," Martin said. "One deal would change everything for me."

The mission was part of the next phase of Canada's export program, which recognizes that the country has a wealth of small- and medium-sized firms that can offer the world unique made-in-Canada goods and services.

Marie Stamp, a trade commissioner at the Canadian embassy in Wash-

ington, said she was pleased with not just the mission but with government promises, including Marchi's commitment this week to put more trade

commissioners into Canadian embassies and consulates. As a result, she said, more market intelligence will be offered to Canadians looking to export their goods and services abroad.

Marjolaine Castonguay, 35, president of PESCA, Conseillers en Biologie Inc., said she doesn't know how much better the intelligence could be.

Her Gaspé company employs six people and last year made sales of \$300,000 improving fish-spawning areas.

Castonguay, who speaks little English, arrived in Washington on Tuesday with a suitcase full of her firm's brochures, but small expectations.

But as the mission drew to a close yesterday, she said she felt like she was walking on water.

"They were serious," Castonguay said after meeting representatives of two Virginia firms. "It could mean a four-year project and \$1 million."

"They said nobody does what we do," she added. "I have to come back here in a month. I guess I'll learn English."

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