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Claudette Garnier (left), Emerance Martin and Marjolaine Castonguay stood tall in front of the U.S. capital's Capitol Building.

Fishing for D.C. deals

Woman entrepreneurs took their hooks to Washington

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The Gazette

WASHINGTON — Claudette Garnier had no qualms about being part of the first-ever all-woman trade mission to the U.S. capital. It meant a chance to show off her goods south of the border.

Garnier, one of several woman entrepreneurs from the Gaspé region who have found innovative ways to market fish, was on a four-day federal-government trade mission to Washington led by International Trade Minister Sergio Marchi.

The mission, with 125 Canadian businesswomen, 24 of them from Quebec, ended yesterday with match-making sessions between the Canadian businesswomen and representatives of 80 Washington-area firms.

Garnier's products — quality leather goods made from fish skins — are sold in about 30 boutiques across Quebec and last year racked up \$175,000 worth of sales for Garnier's small company, *Les Cuirs de la Mer Inc.*, in Bonaventure on the Gaspé coast.

However, as eye-catching as Garnier's leather goods are, they went not as potential exports, but as gifts when

Team Quebec's trade mission toured China this month. "Bouchard's office called and ordered 24 notebook holders before they left," said Garnier. "Until then, I didn't even know about that mission."

This week, however, the 54-year-old Gaspé businesswoman was in the know — and happy to be showing off her fish skin garments, wallets and key chains as potential exports. Garnier, who has been in the fish skin business for 12 years, had meetings with two prospective U.S. distributors.

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