

WOMAN NEWSMAGAZINE AUTUMN 1997
Toronto (circ 10,000)

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Women's Team Canada Trade Mission to Washington

WOMAN Newsmagazine

Women who want to do business internationally have an "unprecedented opportunity" to make connections this fall. A Canadian businesswomen's international trade mission, the first of its kind ever, and an initiative of the Canadian Women's International Business Initiative (CWIBI) in conjunction with the Canadian Embassy, will happen November 11-14 in Washington, D.C. "Women business owners have been traditionally under-represented in the exporting community," says Judy Bradt, Director for Government Markets at the Canadian Embassy in Washington that is organizing this event. "CWIBI is designed to reach out to Canadian women business owners and business leaders who are

successful in their enterprises in Canada, and [who] might wish to consider the opportunity to expand their business abroad."

Bradt was "present at the creation of this initiative," about a year ago. A few women business leaders from Canada, the US and Mexico, approached the embassy for assistance in preparing a policy position statement on women business owners/leaders in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) countries for the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) forum (the first-ever international economic summit on women entrepreneurs held by the OECD in Paris, France, in April, 1997). "A local contact here was standing in the door to my office,"

says Bradt, "and three things came together: our very strong emphasis by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade on encouraging trade through exporting; the report, *Myths & Realities* [a report on the economic power of women-led firms in Canada] came out, and suddenly this group [of women business leaders] came to us. [And we thought:] why don't we see more women business owners [doing international business]? So Astrid Pregel, Minister Counsellor, Commercial, and I met with Andriana Lever [past president of the Women Entrepreneurs of Canada] and we said "What about this. What do you think?" and it just took off from there." CWIBI organizers expect 80 to 100 women to attend, and the focus will be on helping women develop networks and contacts, and find business leads. The mid-Atlantic region (Maryland, Virginia, Eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, District of Columbia) is the jumping off point. Says Bradt: "Over 7,500 American business, trade and industry associations are headquartered in the Washington area. ... A visit to Washington can be an excellent opportunity to connect with influen-

tial American business leaders who can give them nationwide reach."

Interested women should apply soon. "Anybody that wants to come can send a one page fax to the embassy (202-682-7619 Attention: Kathryn Aleong) ... [expressing their interest]. We will then send forms and an exporter profile, then follow up in person, to assess the fit between the company's objectives and the trade mission program. ... We are aiming to set up three one-on-one business meetings [for each delegate] based on the information they provide us," says Bradt. The fee to attend is \$300.

The trade mission, presented by The Royal Bank of Canada and sponsored by the Business Development Bank of Canada, Export Development Corporation, and others, will be headed up by the Honourable Sergio Marchi, Minister for International Trade. Marchi's presence is symbolic of Canada's "extraordinary focus and commitment to the needs of women business owners, and its interest in ensuring women share in Canada's economic growth, of which exporting is so important," says Bradt. ♦