

## Women-only trade mission taps U.S.

### 125 business leaders explore export markets

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**B**ev 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 they are all 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 sweatshirts, 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, who was hoping she would find a market here for the company's new line of U.S. flag apparel.

The mission, the first of its kind for Canada, is almost a perfect fit of mu-

tual interests for the businesswomen and the Canadian government.

With more than \$1 billion in bilateral trade flowing across the Canada-U.S. border every day, the temptation may be to say that Canada's export objectives vis-a-vis their southern neighbor are being met.

But, in truth, both the U.S. and Canada believe that a vast, untapped trade potential lies in the small and

medium-sized firms of both countries which make up an increasing portion of the economy and rarely think beyond their regions.

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.