



WAYNE HIEBERT, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Thérèse McKellar, vice-president of St. John Enterprises, is one of several women travelling to Washington, D.C., on a trade mission. She wants to sell computer-based multimedia versions of first aid and babysitting programs.

All-female trade mission cuts trail into lucrative U.S.

Marketing wares outside of country missing experience for many women

BY JULIA ELLIOTT
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The Ottawa Citizen

As Thérèse McKellar issues sales figures and market hopes, you can almost hear a rehearsed pitch.

No wonder. Her clear, no-nonsense delivery is going to help sell Americans on St. John Ambulance health-related products and training programs, among them child care, babysitting, home and occupational safety. Next spring, she hopes to have "paper-based" programs available on software.

Ms. McKellar, chief operating officer of St. John Enterprises, is one of 125 businesswomen accompanying Trade Minister Sergio Marchi on a three-day Team Canada trade mission to the Washington, D.C., area. The event is designed to create even greater opportunities for Canadian products in the U.S.

The mission, the first of its kind for Canada, is almost a perfect fit of mutual 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 neighbour are being met.

But in truth, the U.S. and Canada believe that a vast, untapped trade potential lies in the small and midsize firms of both countries that comprise 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 midsize firms are growing at three or four times the rate of those directed by men. There are 700,000 women-led businesses in Canada, accounting for 1.7 million jobs.

At the same time, women business owners are the new kids on the block in the world of commerce and the least likely to have experience marketing their products and expertise outside the country. The government hopes this mission will help double the number of Canadian exporters by the turn of the century. About 5,000 companies had significant export sales in 1995.

Ms. McKellar, a 46-year-old accountant and former senior manager with Bank of Montreal, is one of seven women from the Ottawa area on the trade mission.

The mission is billed as a chance for Canadian businesswomen to learn more about the whys and wherefors of exporting to the United States. And it provides a big chance to develop business connections with mid-Atlantic states — Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and the District of Columbia — where the country's concentration of high-tech industry is second only to California's Silicon Valley.

Mission organizers are also matching Canadian businesses with firms

dealing in consumer products, business and professional services plus the U.S. government and international financial institutions, says Astrid Pregel, manager of the Canadian Embassy's business development program in Washington.

"What we have (on the trade mission are women who represent) small and medium-sized companies — the majority of which are not exporting — so we're looking for people to network, both among themselves and with Americans," she says.

"Department studies indicate that about 50 per cent of the members of a trade mission can expect to do some pretty concrete business within 18 months."

Ms. McKellar is confident her product can fit into the U.S. market, which especially needs babysitting and home safety training courses. St. John already sells products and programs to Florida and Texas, as well as providing first aid and CPR training in Haiti and Vietnam, and other services in Europe and South America. The company already has a proven track record providing first-aid and CPR training for the Canadian military, RCMP and most airline employees.

Ms. McKellar wants to sell that know-how to the U.S. airline and military market. "Our research told us that in order to grow into the United States, we needed to change our paper-based courses into multimedia, interactive computer-based training.

To accomplish this, St. John paired with JetForm affiliate Why Interactive, a 13-year-old multimedia learning company with 35 employees. And this month, JetForm, Why Interactive and St. John formed a new company called VTVA Interactive Learning Inc.

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