



IN SEARCH OF NEW WINDMILLS

The NAHB:

Women Working Home

A network that helps home-based businesses cope with their common problems

Esther G. Radick

"We women tend to be very earthy in our home-business concepts," says Marion Behr, president of the National Alliance of Home-Based Businesswomen (the NAHB). "Our businesses start small, then we build and structure from the ground up."

This earthiness, the careful nurturing of the creative spark, symbolizes the alliance as well as its members' businesses. Originally a national group, the alliance now has local chapters in some 42 states and is expanding everyday. Yet the alliance began growing from a simple idea, a response to a clearly perceived need.

Several years ago Ms. Behr, as a freelance artist/housewife, was invited to participate in a panel discussion sponsored by an organization in Princeton. The three other invited panelists were women in various home-based businesses.

As the panelists spoke, the audience became increasingly involved in a dialogue with them. First one woman spoke of her experiences in the job market, and soon

other members of the audience added comments and questions. It was quickly obvious that they shared a desperate need to work, a disillusionment with the traditional job market, and a newly-awakened interest in the option of home-based businesses.

The whole question of women and work demanded study. How were women coping with juggling work and all their other responsibilities? How many women were working home? What sorts of work were they doing? Ms. Behr resolved to determine the answers.

Learning that a professional survey would be very expensive, she sought another method to determine the current state of women's home-based businesses. With a friend she developed a questionnaire to reach the "invisible work force," the estimated 1-5 million women working home. These women were asked to describe their occupations and the joys and tribulations of working at home.

The next step involved distribution. Here, as Ms. Behr says, "Luck and timing helped make the questionnaire a huge success."

Many organizations agreed to include it in their bulletins and newsletters. And a magazine called *Enterprising Women* included an extensive survey in its premier issue.

The response was incredible. Though women loved working home, two specific problems seemed universal. One was the isolation factor. Women working at home needed a way to exchange ideas, to pool information, to network. This factor pointed to the need for an organization, as did the second problem area: the need for a strong voice, an identity, in dealing with the government and other public agencies.

As the alliance grew, two distinct branches developed. The NAHB is a not-for-profit organization. Women Working Home, Inc., has published a book containing many of the questionnaire responses, and much more, called *Women Working Home*. For this project, Ms. Behr called on an old friend, Wendy Lazar, to be her partner. At business manager Arleen Priest's suggestion, the women self-published the book. Terry Tepper of Chicago provided delightful photographs.

"We wanted the book to be extremely professional," says Ms. Behr, "with emphasis on its professional quality, to do justice to the home-based businesswoman. Before this, homemade work had often been regarded as haphazard, of questionable quality. With our book, we wanted to show that this was not true."

The alliance has succeeded in combating the isolation factor and in making the public aware that

over



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Women Working Home.

women working home offer products and services of the highest professional quality. As the alliance continues to grow, new directions and goals arise. The next goal is establishing an educational program to encourage more women to get started.

"People have natural abilities," Ms. Behr points out. "A lot of people who do things could move one dimension further if they thought of themselves as able to do it. For instance, a woman who enjoys cooking can expand to a catering service, and/or frozen foods. Someone who grows herbs might consider packaging for sales. But we have to push beyond the basics, get started, move, expand!"

Women are not the only target for education. Ms. Behr envisions entrepreneur-type courses in schools, to help students decide whether college is their best

choice, or even necessary. And home-based businesses, in fields such as telecommunications and computer programming, offer a great potential for the home-based handicapped.

"Being in the NAHB is like being a pioneer. Everyday, there are wonderful new discoveries. We have a mix of ages and experience, the young approach, in mature individuals and visa versa."

When Ms. Behr reflects on the growth of the NAHB and the variety of businesses women have created, she is constantly amazed. And she is enthusiastic and inspiring. She is a perfect example of taking that step beyond, reaching, stretching your horizons, and seeing how very far you can go.

For additional information about the alliance, please write to the NAHB, P.O. Box 95, Norwood, N.J. 07648. □


Of Consuming Interest

frigerator should be 38 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, while the freezer should register zero to 5 degrees.

Savvy sales shopping...

Did you know that department and retail stores hold the three biggest winter coat sales on Columbus Day, Election Day and Veteran's Day, all before winter officially arrives? Did you know that the best breaks on bathing suits is to buy before the Fourth of July? That the best time, price-wise, to purchase a fur coat is in August?

Most people associate bargains with discount stores, assuming that if there is a sale at a fashionable retail or department store, the merchandise is out-of-season, out-of-style, left-over goods. Not so, says Judy Young Ocko, a retailing expert, and the co-author of a book, *The Savvy Shopper*. The book takes a look at the retail industry, and goes behind the scenes of the stores where consumers shop. It sells for \$5.95; by Ballantine Books.



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