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NAWBO Phoenix marks 25th anniversary

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When Carolyn Brown went to a meeting about forming a female-focused business group in Phoenix in the mid-1980s, she had no idea it would become the third-largest chapter of a national organization.



Brown

"It was about 12 of us, and we just sat down in a conference room," Brown said. "Phoenix in 1985, it was very different. There had always been a lot of networking organizations for men, but we were looking specifically to create a group for women business owners across all industries."

That meeting led to the formation of the Phoenix Chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners.

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NAWBO

FOUNDED: 1975
PHOENIX CHAPTER: 1985
U.S. CHAPTERS: More than 80
U.S. MEMBERS: 7,000
VALLEY MEMBERS: 300
WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES:
10 million nationwide

NAWBO MEMBERS

25 percent have annual sales of more than \$1 million

42 percent have annual sales of more than \$250,000

9.7 years Average length of business ownership



NAWBO: Group lobbies on a national level for women's business issues

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Today, NAWBO Phoenix has 300 members. It's one of three Arizona chapters and the third-largest on the group's national roster.

NAWBO has more than 80 chapters and 7,000 members nationwide. The national headquarters is in Washington.

"I don't really think that we thought about the future of the organization in the beginning. It was an effort that was very much about growth, growing your business, growing as a business owner and growing your networks," said Brown.

The 1980s were before the days of Twitter, Facebook, e-mail and cell phones, so developing a network was much more about Rolodexes and face-to-face meetings.

"The '80s — that was the age of 'dress for success,' so we would all wear these navy blue suits with white blouses and little ties," recalled Brown.

A past president of the local chapter,

Brown was honored earlier this year as the U.S. Small Business Administration's Women in Business Champion of the Year.

Chapter President Loretta Love Huff, owner of Emerald Harvest Consulting, was among the *Phoenix Business Journal's* 2010 Women in Business, which recognizes outstanding female entrepreneurs.

NAWBO Phoenix members Kim Marie Branch-Pettid, owner of LeTip International, and Pam Gaber, CEO of Gabriel's Angels, also were included in the 2010 listing.

NAWBO "is really a huge, high-energy atmosphere. It's people that are happy to be there, and that's magnetic in and of itself," said Huff.

The organization offers networking, a "buddy" program for new members, and educational opportunities about business and community issues.

In addition, the group sends a weekly e-mail about happenings among member businesses and a variety of other services

EVENT FACTS

WHAT: 2010 Desert Diamonds Awards Gala and 25th anniversary event

WHO: National Association of Women Business Owners-Phoenix Chapter

WHEN: June 23, 7 to 9 p.m.

WHERE: Phoenix Country Club, 2901 N. Seventh St.

WHY: To recognize outstanding businesswomen

WEB: www.nawbophx.org

to help connect members with like-minded businesswomen.

NAWBO also lobbies on a national level for issues important to women entrepreneurs.

Huff will help recognize the local chapter and the accomplishments of its members at the group's annual gala later this month.

In addition to presenting five annual awards, the group will give its first Visionary Award, which recognizes an individual who may not be a member of the group, but who has contributed to the community.

The event will be held at the Phoenix Country Club, a venue that previously offered gender-specific dining at men's and women's grills.

While the club also operated a co-ed restaurant, the separate grills led to some legal wrangling that resulted in a settlement with the Arizona Attorney General's Office last year. The practice since has ended.

Huff said leaders of NAWBO met and discussed the pros and cons of using the facility, given the controversy. Members agreed it was the best place to gather.

"The facility has been fully renovated and is quite nice, open and accessible. We've met with them, and they really worked with us," Huff said.



Huff