

WOMEN'S INTUITION

By Rayanne Brennan

Five power brokers confirm that, sometimes, you just have to go with your gut.

Meet five women who are making a difference in Atlantic Canada. Members of the unofficial sisterhood of Atlantic Canada's top female executives, they are as diverse as they are dynamic. Yet they share a number of qualities common to successful businesswomen. They are go-getters, risk-takers and trailblazers. They ignored their naysayers, knocked down barriers, turned adversities into advantages and juggled the competing demands of home and work to keep their businesses going and growing. For the enterprising women profiled on the following pages, the saying, "do what you love and the money will come," definitely holds true.



Marina Atwell

President, Velocity Entertainment Inc. | Halifax, NS

A STAR IS BORN Though her job is to shine the spotlight on others, it's Marina Atwell who has taken center stage. Last year, she received the Entrepreneur/Innovator Award from the Canadian Progress Club-Halifax Cornwallis at its Women of Excellence Awards. This year, she is nominated for an RBC Canadian Woman Entrepreneur Award (the Bell Trailblazer Award). Described as a mentor, visionary and leader, Atwell meets the national award's definition of a "true trend-setter".

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! Atwell, a marketing and communications specialist with an extensive background in corporate project management, founded Velocity seven years ago. The native Nova Scotian says she was often told she should be running her own business, to which she always responded: "Marketing what?" She received the answer when she volunteered her services to help a charitable

organization hold a fundraiser. Atwell shared her expertise in branding, sponsorship development and media relations, resulting in an event that lived up to its name: "A Night to Remember".

HOOKEK ON A FEELING Atwell says a woman should always trust her intuition. "Whenever provided with an opportunity, always ask yourself: 'Who has the most to gain and who has the most to lose from it'. I believe listening to your gut and asking yourself this question will help enable you to make good business decisions."

BEHIND THE SCENES When Atwell needs to get away from it all, she loves to camp. "Yes, in a tent," she adds, "and near the ocean and beach, of course. I like how camping the traditional way takes you away from the hectic pace of everyday life and forces you to enjoy life's greatest gifts – nature and conver-



sation...." She also enjoys motorcycling, mountain biking and dog sitting for friends.

HELPING HANDS Atwell describes herself as having a passion to help 'the little guy'. "This makes me work twice as hard to be in a position to be able to make a difference." It also explains her active community involvement and management of the career of local singer/songwriter Mike Trask who is nominated for his own Music Nova Scotia Award this year. "That feeds my soul – helping someone who works so hard and is so talented."

Nicola MacNaughton

Owner, Occupational Concepts Ltd. | Moncton, NB

PARTY TIME 2009 has been a year of celebration for the owner of Occupational Concepts Limited. On September 1, she marked the 10th anniversary of her business and in July she received the New Brunswick Association of CBDC's Woman Entrepreneur of the Year award.

FATE AND FAITH Occupational Concepts is the realization of a long-held dream for MacNaughton. Her training and work as an occupational therapist were stepping stones to the place she is today – owner of the largest privately-owned rehabilitation clinic in Atlantic Canada, comprised of a 9,000 sq. ft. clinic employing 15 health care professionals and two maintenance and administrative staff. MacNaughton has the classic characteristics of a successful businessperson: risk taker, visionary and the ability to recognize the need for help and accept that help. She is also determined. "'No, you can not do that' is not an option," she says.

ESPRIT DE CORPS To promote a positive work environment, MacNaughton regularly organizes team building excursions such as a limousine-driven shopping trip to Halifax, a visit to the race tracks in Charlottetown and, most recently, a salmon fishing adventure on New Brunswick's Miramichi River. "I am in the service delivery business and while the business itself is system dependant, the systems are only as good as the people you have to deliver them."

MASTER OF MULTI-TASKING If managing a business and raising two teenagers wasn't daunting enough, MacNaughton co-chairs an annual ringuette tournament every March break that draws 2,000 girls to Moncton. She "loves" to scrapbook and spends a few hours each week teaching classes at her husband's business (MY GYM Children's Fitness Center). She is also taking a correspondence course from the New



York Institute of photography and "sneaks off" to the gym three times a week.

SAGE ADVICE Chief among the wisdom that guides MacNaughton is the phrase: 'make business decisions, not emotional decisions'. "I learned this from my financial consultant Charles Gaudet and I have never forgotten it when I am making big decisions." Asked if she has other advice for aspiring entrepreneurs, she responds: "Don't be afraid, think big. If you have an idea and you have done your research and it all makes sense, go for it, all the way!"



Newfoundland and Labrador's Own... Awarded **"Broker of the Year for North America"**

Though it's technically an individual award, Exit Realty on the Rock franchisee Anne Squires says her recent acknowledgement as **"Broker of the Year for North America"** by Exit Corp International is a reflection of her team's collective abilities.

"I'm honored that Exit Corp International named me their broker of the year, but I think it would be more appropriate to call it a **'brokerage of the year'** award," Squires said following the award presentation in Washington, DC. "Exit Realty on the Rock wouldn't be the success it is without the dedication of my sales team, administration team and a general public who has embraced our business since its inception."

Exit Realty on the Rock has almost 90 employees and offices in St. John's, Conception Bay South, Clarenville and Gander, Newfoundland and Labrador.

In addition to the broker of the year award, Exit Realty on the Rock agent Pamela Norman of Bay Roberts, NL took home top honors as Canadian **"Rookie of the Year"**.

www.exitrealtynl.com
709.576.6667



Brenda vanDuinkerken

President, Duinkerken Foods | Charlottetown, PEI

TURNING POINT In 2000, Brenda vanDuinkerken weighed a mere 97 pounds. Six years earlier, she had been diagnosed with celiac disease (an intolerance to wheat protein for which there is no cure or medication). Once she adopted a strict gluten-free diet, however, her health recovered and her weight returned. Still, she missed breads and sweets and the gluten-free products on the market were “tasteless”. She decided to make the gluten-free diet more enjoyable for herself and other disease sufferers. Today, the company she founded has a 2,700 sq. ft. facility in Charlottetown, employs six people full-time and produces bread, muffin, cookie, waffle and biscuit baking mixes, plus a line of vitamin-enriched flours.

EXPANDING MARKET Since Duinkerken Foods was incorporated in 2005, the gluten-free market has exploded. “Gluten-free is one of the fastest-growing markets in specialty foods (internationally),” she says. The reason for this surge in growth is better awareness and diagnosis of the disease, with one in 100 people now having some form of the disease.

LUCKY BREAK Her first customer was Cisco Foods, which introduced her products to hospitality and nursing facilities throughout Atlantic Canada. “That opened the door for a lot of other business.” She then approached the top grocery retailers in Canada and the U.S. to try her products. “They were as anxious as I was to get the products on the shelves.” Today, Duinkerken mixes and flours are sold in most of the leading supermarkets and specialty stores throughout North America. “It’s been a lot of hard work, but it’s been rewarding for sure.”

FOOT IN THE DOOR Earlier this year, vanDuinkerken became the first woman business owner in Atlantic Canada to receive WeConnect, Canada’s Women Business Enterprise Qualification, an international standard that opens access to contracts with Fortune 500 corporations in Canada and around the world. “It’s going to open a lot of doors,” she says “and a lot of times that’s all we (businesspeople) need.” Indeed, her company has experienced a significant boost in product sales since becoming certified.



Michele Stevens

Owner, Michele Stevens Sailoft Ltd. | Lunenburg, NS

IN HER BLOOD A seamstress who operated a quilt and drapery store before opening her Sailoft in 1994, Michele Stevens is a fourth-generation sail maker and the first female to continue her family’s century-old tradition. Nestled in Nova Scotia’s scenic Second Peninsula, near Lunenburg, her year-round operation employs three full-time sail makers who handcraft and repair cruising sails for private and commercial boats of all sizes, from dinghies to yachts.

CLAIM TO FAME The Stevens family has a storied history of sail making that began with her great-grandfather Randolph during the glory days of “wooden ships and iron men”. Randolph crewed as a sail trimmer on the original Bluenose when the famous schooner wore the crown of “Queen of the North Atlantic”. That’s why her largest contract to date (to build the foresail, mainsail and fore gaff-sail for the Bluenose II) was so significant. Three generations of Randolph’s descendants (Stevens, her father and grandfather) worked side by side to create the 4,150 sq. ft. mainsail for the magnificent ship’s reincarnation, which is recognized as the largest working mainsail in the world.

THE FOURTH “P” When asked if it was purpose, profit or passion that fuels her entrepreneurial drive, she responds with a fourth ‘P’ – pride, as in her pride in her family’s deep and rich association with the sea. The Bluenose mainsail is her company’s signature piece, but other notable examples of its custom work are the sails for the tall ship Concordia. She credits her father for having the “greatest influence” on her career. “He is truly an amazing person and dedicated to the craft of sail making.”

LESSONS LEARNED Like all business owners, Stevens has learned some hard-won lessons along the way, like “shortcuts don’t work”. Her advice to start-up entrepreneurs is “never look back. Make a decision and keep going. You waste a lot of energy second guessing yourself.” Stevens attributes her success to “stubbornness”, guided and motivated by three words: “Never give up”.

Hege Rognø

Vice President, Offshore East Coast Canada, StatoilHydro | St. John's, NL

GLOBETROTTER It was Hege Rognø's love of travel and the opportunity to visit new countries and experience other cultures that drew her to the oil industry 25 years ago. She's been on the move ever since. After receiving her master degree in geology and geophysics from the Norwegian Institute of Technology in 1983, she began her career with Statoil at its main office in Stavanger; furthered her studies in London, England; did project work in New Orleans; worked for Santos in Australia; returned to Norway where she held various management positions with Statoil; and, this past June moved to St. John's, Newfoundland to take on the role of vice president of Offshore East Coast Canada with StatoilHydro. Even here, though, she is still on the move: she crisscrosses Canada on a regular basis.

MOTIVATION "Develop new ideas and drive change" is a leadership slogan at StatoilHydro and a motto that motivates Rognø. "That one (drive change) is closest to my heart." She brings a number of lead-

ership qualities to the international energy company, including: "sound and deep insight into the subsurface part of the business"; an understanding of business development; international experience and perspective, and, in her words, "a female way of viewing the world." She also describes herself as "strong willed, hard-working and curious", characteristics that serve her well as head of StatoilHydro's eastern Canada oil and gas operations.

INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE Rognø credits a number of people for leading her up the corporate ladder. Among them is the "insightful advisor" who convinced her that there was a future in the (Norwegian) oil business; "the guy who gave me the job opportunity in Australia"; and, the only female manager she ever had, Hege Norheim. "She has lots of guts and confidence and true willingness to share her position and power." Her advice to other female executives is "be yourself. Don't assume that you have to be like the others, mostly men, to be worthwhile." ●

Photo: Greg Locke



Enter our online trivia contest:
atlanticbusinessmagazine.com

Volume 10, No. 5 (1999): "Canadians enjoy a greater degree of peace of mind knowing that catastrophic illness will not wipe out their net worth, nor will day-to-day health concerns be overlooked because of poverty," concludes Margie Clow-Bohan in "For Richer, For Poorer", a comparative analysis of the Canadian and American health care systems.



Ovarian Cancer Canada
Cancer de l'ovaire Canada



The Pap test
screens for ovarian
cancer, right?

WRONG.

Get curious – Find out more
Visit www.ovariancanada.org
1-866-825-0788

Logistics and Transportation SOLUTIONS

An owner operated Canadian company
with over 20 years of transportation experience

Fully insured with comprehensive liability
and cargo insurance

24 hour guaranteed service, Hazardous
goods service, expedited/time sensitive freight

Serving Canada, United States and Overseas

//////////
Demand Logistics is a company that is
dedicated to making your transportation needs
our top priority. We have the equipment, the
infrastructure, the staff and the flexibility to deliver
your goods on time and in order. Our competitive
pricing will be sure to please your bottom line.
Call us today to talk about your transportation
and logistic solutions.



59 Cranston Drive
Porters Lake, NS B3E 1E9
Toll Free: 1.877.451.7634
Fax: 902.827.1396
demandl@look.ca

www.demandl.com