

Rochester Women's Network hosts business conference

Written by Robin L. Flanigan

8:10 PM, Sep. 24, 2013 |

democratandchronicle.com

Five women were honored as 2013 Up & Coming Businesswomen at the Rochester Women's Network's "Empowering Professional Growth" luncheon at the Rochester Plaza Hotel on Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. Honorees are, from left, Leah Shearer, Debbie Bernacki, Elizabeth Bell, Dresden Engle and Rebecca Priest.

2013 Up & Coming Businesswomen Awards

Several women were recognized during the Summit Business Conference for professional accomplishments. • **Debbie Bernacki**, CEO at Happier at Home. • **Elizabeth Dell**, associate professor, Manufacturing & Mechanical Engineering Technology and Packaging Science Department at RIT. • **Dresden Engle**, director at Dresden Public Relations Inc. • **Rebecca Priest**, administrator at St. John's Home. • **Leah Shearer**, program coordinator of the Teens Living with Cancer Program and Melissa's Living Legacy Teen Cancer Foundation.

There was lots of talk about innovation, compassion, and success at the Rochester Women's Network's 16th annual Summit Business Conference Tuesday.

With "Empowering Professional Growth" as its theme, the event, which drew 125 people, included breakout sessions on financial planning, negotiation skills, effective leadership and other topics aimed at encouraging women to use their strengths for personal and professional growth.

"I always pick up something that helps me," said Karen Schuhle-Williams, an annual attendee and an RWN member since 1999. A highlight for her this year was learning to offer a more thoughtful response when comments make her defensive.

"I do that with people who have a different perspective and background than me, but not with people who are like me, which is not a good construct," she said. "I'm going to be more observant."

Keynote speaker Naomi Silver, president and CEO of Rochester Community Baseball Inc., offered advice gleaned from working in a male-dominated industry: Don't let temporary flare-ups permanently mar future opportunities; stay humble; and take responsibility for mistakes when warranted.

"Integrity is everything in this world," she said.

It's a world in which "breaking the status quo has become the new status quo," said speaker Jennifer Indovina, CEO and co-founder of locally based tech company Tenrehte Technologies Inc. Indovina looks forward to a time when "we have discussions not about what women leaders look like, but what their leadership potential is based on their personality."

Kim Lonon, a supervisor who admits "it has been difficult this past year with some employees," handed out business cards in hopes of forming ongoing relationships with women who can relate to her professional challenges.

“I had some meaningful conversations,” she said. “It’s the first time I’m reaching out like this, and it feels good.”

Flanigan is a freelance writer covering the Rochester area.