

# Start and Grow Your Business

Northern Women's Symposium, Fort St. John March 30, 2006

presented by

WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE  CENTRE

*It's your business.  
Start. Grow. Succeed.*



## Workshop Agenda

**9:50 am – 2:55 pm**

### **Workshop 1: Moving Up! Growing Your Business**

New strategies for building business success

**Workshop Description:** This energizing workshop will help move your business to the next level with insights and advice about strategy, marketing, and the latest small business trend: strategic alliances.

#### **Workshop Focus #1: Developing a Strategic Edge**

Develop a Strategic Edge - What is a strategic edge and why develop one?  
Steps to creating a strategic edge

#### **Workshop Focus #2: Strategic Alliances**

The how's and why's; why develop strategic alliances?  
Formal or informal? How to select alliances;  
Where do alliances originate? Innovate!

#### **Workshop Guest Speakers**

Shauna Hill, Owner - Hill Computing Inc  
Judy Defosses - Owner, Northern Vac Services Ltd. and Wilson Concrete

**9:50 am – 2:55 pm**

### **Workshop 2: Going Solo – For Aspiring Entrepreneurs**

**Workshop Description:** Find out what it takes to be your own boss! Learn key steps, pitfalls and tips of starting and running a business in BC. Experienced business women will provide a dose of wisdom and inspiration using examples from their own lessons and success stories.

#### **Workshop Guest Speakers:**

Henriette Landry - Co-owner, Moberly Lake Water Hauling Services  
Geraldine Davis, Co-owner - Davis First Aid & Safety Services Ltd  
Jennifer Greenburg - Owner Phoenix First Aid Services

There will be a coffee break in the morning at 10:40 a.m. and afternoon at 1:50 p.m.  
Lunch will be served from 11:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.



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## *Geraldine Davis, Co-owner,* Davis First Aid & Safety Services Ltd

When Geraldine was young, she wanted to be a paramedic. But then life and kids came along. She decided she could keep her life on the Blueberry Rivers First Nation reserve if she shifted her original dream to 'First Aid'. As a mom, being self-employed also seemed to be a good idea. Three years ago, she and Alvina opened their business, and today, a total of 5 trucks and 5 full-time level 3 first aid attendants provide mobile first aid services to the oil field industry.

Between the vision and the implementation was a learning curve that Geraldine managed very well. Because competition in the field is so high, she says: "I knew I couldn't depend on others to make my business happen. I had to put in the time and effort to make my business a success. I did research by asking many oil companies: 'if I was to start up a business would they be willing to hire me?' They said yes and then we got supporting letters from them to support my business plan."

Translating research into numbers was challenging: "We needed funds to start. At first I was overwhelmed by the business plan and the hoops I had to jump through. I found myself redoing it over and over until it was correct. However, by the time I was finished, I had no problem acquiring the start-up funding because I had demonstrated that I really understood what my business would encompass, both the bothers and the strengths."

Geraldine feels the biggest lessons she has learned while getting her business up and running were in being loyal and having the patience that in the long run everything will pay off. She is also clear on what work can be delegated and what needs to be kept: "Have a solid plan, create it yourself; don't have someone else do it for you, or you won't fully understand all the process will encompass. On the other hand, ensure that you do not do everything yourself, hire a very good bookkeeper, but always understand and oversee your financial management."

Geraldine's strong work ethic, skilled and professional staff, diligence to solve problems and meet the demands of her customers, have all ranked Davis First Aid as a leader in the field. Growth has been strong and steady, and her original 5-year goals have already been surpassed. Time to revise the numbers.....!

## *Henriette Landry – Co-owner,* Moberly Lake Water Hauling Services



Located on Highway 29 in Moberly Lake, Henriette started Moberly Lake Water Hauling Services 2 years ago to service the North East BC oil field industries and the local coal mine industry. Her business provides a variety of services: rig water hauling, dust suppression, fire suppression, lease preparation, freezing roads, and spray bar work.

An interesting switch for someone who, for 14 years, ran a hair dressing shop in Chetwynd. But for Henriette, it made perfect sense: "When I sat on council for Sauleteau First Nations I played a part in doing the agreements with industry for potential job opportunities that were happening in our area. We had a contractors list that was shared with industry and they had always asked why no one had a water truck to service the drilling rigs and coal mines."

When she left the council, she decided to invest in something that was lacking in the community: "I did research on the demand for water trucks in our area, and who my competitors were. I went on the net and researched trucking companies in BC and Alberta. I even went through all the phone books. What I discovered told me it would be a good risk and a very good investment." The research gave her the courage, determination, and confidence to create the business. She found a funder who took a risk in her name and recently paid off the loan. Now she is preparing for expansion.

Henriette has learned all along the way: "The biggest lesson I have learned in operating my business is keeping business records and accounts in order. Marketing the business has really helped growth...knowing where the business opportunities are and doing follow up work with potential and past customers."

Her advice to women starting out? "Educate yourselves on topics as business planning, organizational structure, human resource management, and related learning pertaining to your business of choice. As women we have no limits....reach for the sky!"

## *Jennifer Greenberg – Owner*, Phoenix First Aid Services

Jennifer Greenberg was on her way to medical school when she found out that she was having her third child. After staying home for a few years, she started looking for ways to get her brain stimulated and to transfer her original dream into reality. Her reality, Phoenix First Aid, was launched 3 months ago.



Based in Merritt, Jennifer originally enrolled in paramedic training as a first step. Natural curiosity led her to listen to why other people were in the course. She questioned her instructor about opportunities and ideas. The best ones seemed related to the oil and gas industry. That led her to internet searches: “There wasn’t a lot of information, but what I had learned so far gave me some confidence. I learned that this industry operates in the ‘here and now’...and you can’t depend upon people who say they are going to do something, and then not deliver. So I used my own money, bought the first truck and drove 1,000 miles from my home, started knocking on doors and handing out business cards. I realized that I would not secure my first contract over the phone. I would have to go up and let people see my face, to know that I was reliable and professional.”

Paramedic or business owner? Merritt or Tumbler Ridge? How to make everything work? That was a big part of the learning process. Jennifer realized that her life would work better as a manager than a do-er. She deliberately planned both the business format and her role within it to run effectively and efficiently... both for customers, her staff, and herself. “I like both roles; I see it as balance. But you have to be able to move between your roles as needed.”

No matter how organized she was, the universe, as usual, demanded flexibility: “I drove up with the first truck the beginning of January. My original truck ended up being back ordered, and to help me out, my grandfather helped me buy a temp unit to put on a rental truck. Then there was enough work for both trucks, so I just kept going.”

Going is right. Phoenix is now up to 3 units. Jennifer divides her time between Merritt and Tumbler Ridge. Her husband has become part of the business. “I’m a little early on the business plan projections. I kind of figure that God dropped it in my lap.”



## *Shauna Hill, Owner*, Hill Computing Inc

When Shauna Hill set up her original home-based business in the early 1980’s, she needed to manage major back problems. Peaks and valleys in her health meant that she was not a likely candidate for a regular 9-to-5 job. She started with 2 focuses: bookkeeping and software training to larger oil, gas and forestry companies. When she wasn’t feeling well, she would generally give her clients to someone else and start over when she was ready to return to work.

Then she got tired of giving away business and decided to work a little smarter: “For most of my career, I was home-based and trying to do it all myself. Now, I have arranged a network of help, both in office and with other people in my industry. If I find myself in a situation where I have to take some time off again, at least I won’t have to start from scratch anymore.”

Shauna’s moves over the past few years have been bold and courageous. First, she realized that her business offerings would constantly need to adjust to the oil and gas industry: “You have to flow with what is happening around you and respond with different services that meet current needs.” Today, while her business provides business training, support, bookkeeping, proposal and plan writing, and small business services, she is just as likely to be helping oil and gas industry clients write proposals and development papers. Today, she is adding on local community projects, like an upcoming DVD full of South Peace seniors’ stories. Next year, it may be all different.

Second, Shauna has figured out a way to help others and herself too. “I took the leap and bought a commercial building, set up a complete office setting, rented out extra space and hired clerical staff.” The building’s apartments help stabilize the peaks and valleys in her income and health.

Finally, while she has always been generous in sharing, her business structure allows her to receive as well: “I have made contacts in the community so if I can’t help a client here, I will pass along the work to another business, who does the same for me. I have learned the skills of strategic alliances using many different companies and organizations.”

The alliances and support Shauna has developed are paying off now, providing both freedom and safety, and what makes them so valuable is that they meet her own specific needs: “Advance planning, although tedious and a lot of work, is essential. Don’t fly by the seat of your pants!”

## *Judy Defosses – Owner,* Northern Vac Services Ltd. and Wilson Concrete

Judy Defosses biggest cheerleader was her husband, who had his eye on a business he thought she could operate well. “He really wanted it for himself, but he already had his own business,” she laughs. So in 1996, she became the new owner of a ‘fixer-upper’ vacuum business in Fort St John, - mostly residential septic tank service with a couple of old beat-up trucks.



Judy started by re-investing money into one new vac truck and gradually replacing everything with new units. “I took only enough salary to get by,” she says. While the industry was new to her, her ability to research and willingness to learn new things were, in her mind, her greatest strengths in reconfiguring and building the business. She found some excellent resources: “Find professionals you trust and whose advice you value. Be willing to pay for the best accountant because his/her knowledge is invaluable.”

Today, Northern Vac owns 6 newer vacuum units and works mostly in the oil patch. She recently took over Wilson Concrete, a precast and redi-mix operation that supplies and installs concrete for commercial, industrial, and residential customers. Depending upon the time of year, the business can staff between 5 and 15 people.

Northern Vac’s clear focus is on the local market: “We purchase locally, advertise locally, and support local charities and causes.” The nature of the industry makes it smart to service locally first, and it’s beneficial for everyone if the local economy is stimulated first.

Given the local focus, Judy decided to promote Northern Vac as a family-run operation: “I never hesitate to tell my customers that I will be out of the office due to family commitments. I think people like to know that there is more to life than work. Alternatively, I do not hesitate to leave home at 10:00 PM to send a fax if that is what is required.”

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*Thank you for joining us ... We wish you well in your business endeavours!*

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