

Connecting Women in the Automotive Industry

Professional development and support services and organizations

By Gerry Myers

There are fantastic organizations and resources which can help the women in your dealership grow and prosper. Read the following and/or pass this along to them (Mike Roscoe has given permission for you to make copies.)

Kim Ziomek, North American marketing manager for Robert Bosch Corporation, is at the helm of the largest women's organization in the automotive industry, the Automotive Women's Alliance (www.automotivewomensalliance.com). According to the alliance's web site, AWA provides a strategic forum for professional women and organizations in all aspects of the automotive industry.

AWA encourages professional development and supports mentoring opportunities, scholarships and forums for women to network with their peers and address subjects of common concern. AWA serves as an industry voice to the media on issues of interest to women and recognizes achievements of women in the industry. With 200-plus members, and numerous events from educational meetings to fundraising golf tournaments, AWA funded four \$2,500 scholarships this year.

In conjunction with AWA, Detroit women have created a Women's Affinity Group that is a collaborative effort of South Eastern Detroit Area Automotive Industry Women's Resource Groups. Participating companies include GM, Ford, DaimlerChrysler, Dow, Bosch, Lear, JCI, Dupont, Visteon, Delphi, GE, and Yazaki. This group's mission is to support the development and retention of women in automotive careers through shared learning. The Women's Affinity Group hopes to accomplish its objectives by educating employers on women in the workforce and providing recommendations to them on how to retain and develop women in the industry.

Polly Deen, Business Development Director for the Miller Agency, is the current president of the Automotive Women's Network (www.automotivewomensnetwork.com) located in Dallas-Fort Worth. Deen says the organization would like more women in dealerships to join and is currently having a membership drive. In addition to women in dealerships, AWA's roster lists members who are vendors, academic representatives, manufacturers and consultants. Lisa Rogers with Valvoline, along with Sharon Sloan, Northwood University, serve on the board.

Maureen Sullivan Martin, CEO of AutoVisionary, Inc., is an executive advisor to both AWA and AWA. Martin said she is involved in the organizations because she likes to give back to an industry that has given her so much.

"Promoting women in the industry is important to me," she said. "I like the fact that we give scholarships to young girls and introduce them to career opportunities they have never thought about before."

“By attracting and retaining more women in the industry, the sales force would better reflect the customer base and encourage more women to consider the auto industry,” she said.

AWARE, Advancing Women in Automotive Retail Enterprises (www.awareforwomen.org), was formed to promote networking and advance women’s careers in all areas of automotive retail. Caryl Herschman, a U.S. analyst with Toyota North America, New York, serves as the organization’s founding president. “Although AWARE is only a year old, hopes are high about what it can accomplish” she said. AWARE is national in scope and offers members the opportunity to expand their professional network, exchange ideas, advance their careers through mentoring and education, and meet influential women who have achieved success in the industry.

“With more education, knowledge and a network of support, women can gain greater confidence and learn how to be more successful,” Herschman said.

One of the oldest organizations is Women’s Automotive Association International (www.waai.org), which was founded in 1995 by Lorraine Schultz. While the mission of educating, mentoring and connecting women in the industry is similar to the other organizations mentioned above, it has more of an international focus with chapters outside the U.S.

Women Automotive Dealers’ Exec-U-Link (www.advisorylink-dfw.com), a unique organization that is limited to 12 women dealers, is a national group strictly for women who own dealerships and are involved in the day-to-day operations. They meet in Dallas three times a year for a day and half to discuss issues important to them, to get other successful female dealers’ perspectives and insights and to enjoy mutual support and camaraderie that they can experience in no other automotive venue.