

WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES



**Success: Strong Enough for a Man,
but Made by a Woman**

Seven female entrepreneurs share their secrets for succeeding in the male-dominated business world. (Left to right): Bonnie Reppert, Marie C.S. Soucie-Donovan, Suzanna Mak, Jane Pinto, Carol Cline-Ong, Donna Catalfamo. Not shown: Terri Sturm



Nevada is home to an estimated 85,644 privately held, 50 percent or more women-owned firms, according to a study conducted by the Center for Women's Business Research, as of 2006. Those businesses generate more than \$19 billion in sales and employ nearly 91,000 people. Factor in the number of women chief executive officers in Nevada, and the number of firms controlled by woman is even greater. Women in the Silver State run all kinds of businesses, from staffing to beauty salons, even businesses in male-dominated industries, such as aviation and commercial real estate. Following is a sample of some of the state's successful female entrepreneurs. Their profiles are presented with their insights on owning a business as a woman, and advice for young women with the dream of running their own company.



Marie C.S. Soucie-Donovan
MCSS Ltd.

From Picking Potatoes to Placing Prospects

Marie C.S. Soucie-Donovan took her first stab at entrepreneurship as a young child. At a roadside stand in Northern Maine, she sold buckets of

apples that she picked from her family's orchard. "We probably had five cars pass a day, and that was a heavy day," the 60-year-old said.

In fact, it was then that she developed a solid work ethic. She grew up as a foster child with eight older brothers. At age seven, she and her siblings picked potatoes at 4:30 a.m. to pay for school clothes. "I knew I wanted to get out of that environment," she said.

At age 27, after graduating from Boston's IBM Plus School of Business, she co-owned an agency in New Britain, Conn., which placed nurses.

Today, she's the founder and owner of MCSS Ltd., a Reno-based staffing agency. The company provides executive searches, temporary and temp-to-hire personnel, payroll services, employment background checks and polygraphs. Soucie-Donovan has

even placed an astronaut at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. "There's nothing more rewarding than when a client comes to me either two or five years from now and says, 'Thank you for that career, it's the best job I ever had,'" she said. She started MCSS Ltd. in Newark, Calif., in 1987. Nearly a decade later, she traveled to Reno to train some staff members, loved the location and decided to leave the Bay Area. In 1996 she sold the business and started anew in Northern Nevada. Her company now employs 98 people, including her husband, Bob, who is director of business development.

Her greatest business challenge over the years has been breaking into male-dominated industries. Men have ignored, rejected, hung up and refused to talk to her, she said.

Even one of her brothers expressed doubt that she could succeed when she moved to Northern California in the 1980s. "That's where my perseverance came into play," she said. "I loved the challenge. Men underestimate us women all the time. I think with a work ethic and integrity, you can't help but be successful."

At her peak, Soucie-Donovan logged nearly 80 hours a week. She's now slowed to around 50. "There were nights when I'd go to the office to staff clients," she said.

What she enjoys most about self-employment is the ability to experiment with new ideas and methods. "If it doesn't work, I don't have to answer to anybody," she said.

When not attending to business, she likes to spend time with her husband, two sons and eight grandchildren. She's an avid reader, too, typically juggling about seven books.

"I have been very blessed in my life," she said.

To young women considering starting a business, she recommended shadowing somebody already in the field and learning what's involved. "Whatever career you choose, love it," she added. "If you don't, you'll be miserable because you live and breathe it. There are a lot of long hours, determination and perseverance required. If you persevere in life, you will succeed."



Terri Sturm
Territory Inc.

Strength Through Adversity

Terri Sturm's company, Territory Inc., flourished after a setback. Early on she and her husband, Roland, who also works for the company, shared a 2,500-square-foot office space with a partner. One night, he unexpectedly moved out, leaving the couple only a desk. Sturm pressed on, working 70- and 80-hour weeks, seeking out new business, determined to become independent of partners. "When that kind of thing happens, you either fold or pull up your socks," Sturm, 47, said. "Sometimes it's through adversity that you find your strengths. That was the birth of Territory, Inc. Because of that challenge, we are where we are today."

Territory Inc. is a shopping center developer and commercial real estate brokerage. Since its inception in 1993, the Las Vegas-based company has developed nearly 2 million square feet of retail, including the Centennial and Eastern Beltway Centers in Las Vegas. It has another 2 million square

feet under construction and in development. Most projects are in Southern Nevada, with some in Northern Nevada and Utah. "The most rewarding part is being able to drive into one of our shopping centers and say, 'This is us. We created it,'" said Sturm.

After graduating from the University of Nevada, Reno, with a bachelor's degree in science in business administration, with a concentration in real estate, she obtained her real estate license in 1978. Subsequently, she worked for various companies, such as the largest shopping center developer, Simon Property Group, learning the business' corporate and retail sides.

After residing in multiple states, she wound up in Las Vegas in 1990 and decided to pursue self-employment. "It's my own show," she said. "I have nobody to be responsible to but myself."

Sturm considers herself a pro at what she does, with a good résumé and credibility. With that has come the ability, she said, to ignore clients' responses to her being a woman. "With the name Terri, when people don't know who I am, they expect a man to walk in," she said. "It's the first initial shock of, 'Oh, it's a woman.'" She concedes that working in a male-dominated industry has become much easier because acceptance of women in the workplace has improved over the years.

Women in her business have an edge because they tend to be shoppers, she said. On the other hand, Sturm's disadvantaged because she doesn't entertain clients. "A lot of business happens on the golf course and I'm outside that one," she said.

Sturm considers her greatest professional accomplishment to be Territory Inc.'s success. "We have a great company, great employees and great partners, who make it fun to go to work every day," she said.

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She's most proud, however, of her family – her husband and three daughters, ages 7, 10 and 12. With her girls, she rides and shows horses. Sturm also enjoys sewing, cooking (she makes about 500 jars of jam a year), and gardening.

She also is a big supporter of her shopping centers. "I'm in them all the time," she said.



Jane Pinto
Pinto Aviation Services

Flying High

In 2003, Jane Pinto serendipitously stumbled into self-employment. She had just obtained her instructor's certificate for flying helicopters and approached the owners of First Flight Aviation about teaching a few hours a week. In the meeting they proposed the idea of her purchasing the flight school's lease and inventory. Within two months, she did. "It was kismet. It truly was," she said. "I walked into the door looking for something to do part-time and the next thing I knew, I was running a business."

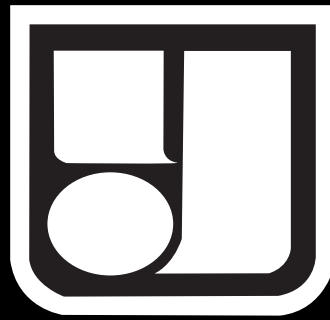
So began Pinto Aviation Services, in Las Vegas. It operates the First Flight Aviation flight school and the Vegas Aviation Supply store, which supplies aircraft parts and pilot supplies. "We took an organization that was barely getting by and improved revenues by approximately 235 percent since the time we took over," Pinto, 46, said. "We've established ourselves as a serious player in the Las Vegas marketplace and we now have two locations."

With a staff of 18, the company operates out of the airports in North Las Vegas and, most recently, Henderson. Pinto is working on starting a Henderson-based charter airline.

Certified and instructor-rated for helicopters, and a private pilot for airplanes, the owner puts in about 60-plus hours a week. "With something that's high risk, you're always thinking about what's going on," she said.

She struggles most with managing the money. "You have to be so careful," she said. "I think that's what causes the downfall of a lot of organizations. We like to all believe [self-employment] is a big glamorous thing, and the truth of the matter is, you're in the trenches. I run a multimillion-dollar company and I'm still cleaning the toilets."

Aspiring entrepreneurs should know they, too, will have to work hard



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and make sacrifices, Pinto noted. “A lot of people go into business thinking their time is going to be their own,” she said. “That is far from the truth.”

For Pinto, aviation is a complete divergence from her previous professional experience. Prior to founding Pinto Aviation Services, she worked for 23 years in information technology at various companies, including GE Aerospace and Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Her business technology degree is from the Arizona Institute of Business Technology.

“Aviation is fairly challenging,” she said. “It’s a large departure from being indoor-bound, although now I sit at a desk and run the operation. In the wild early days, I spent a lot more time outside.”

What she finds most rewarding about the job is being able to give people, early in their flying careers, a place to fulfill their required time and experience.

“We have had extremely good success moving people along to the next level into dignified jobs,” she said. “We’re proud of our 400 percent turnover rate.”

About running a business, she said, “Once you hit your groove, there’s nothing like it. There’s nothing like being your own boss.”



Suzanna Mak
PC Doctor

Expertise Brings International Success

In college at Stanford, Suzanna Mak, 38, studied East Asian Studies. She went on to law school at Santa Clara University and worked as a California prosecutor for about eight years. While in that position, she developed, with a partner, a profitable business producing training materials for police officers. Then she moved into legal consulting for businesses and worked for Travel Zoo. Her latest career is in business, as the chief executive officer of PC Doctor. “I have an experience of thinking I want to be something, getting there and deciding that’s not enough,” she said. “It’s continual – the glass is not full enough.”

PC Doctor, founded by Aki Kohonen in 1993 in California, is a software company that provides hardware diagnostics testing to companies that manufacture, rebuild, refurbish or repair computers. The 100-employee firm is based in Reno and has sales offices in Beijing and Tokyo.



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In 2003, Mak was providing legal consultation to PC Doctor when Kohonen told her he was moving the company to Reno that year and offered her the job of CEO. She accepted and currently owns 50 percent of the company.

In the last two years, she spent nearly 50 percent of her time traveling overseas, primarily to Asia. When she's traveling, she works between 80 and 100 hours a week. Recently, however, she's stayed in Reno and has been putting in "a pretty mellow 80-hour workweek," she said.

The self-described "outdoors freak" ensures she exercises every day, whether it be working out at a gym, hiking or playing tennis. And she gets in reading time at each day's end (she enjoys legal thrillers).

The payoff for her long hours is the sense of satisfaction that derives from making money. "I feel like I do good when I get a contract signed or a check comes in for quarterly payment," she said.

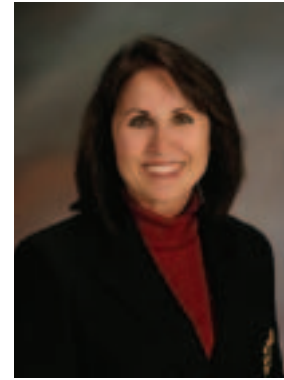
She said oftentimes the biggest obstacle for women, in general, is self-doubt. "We troubleshoot ourselves, and we are formidable," she said. "We cannot turn it off."

Contrarily, she believes being a woman is a strength, as they can multitask "with panache" and communicate better verbally. "A lot of business is making the other party feel comfortable and evoking trust," she said. "We tend to do that with a little more ease than men."

When she travels to Asian cities, she encounters comments about her gender. "I still go to meetings in Tokyo or Taipei or Beijing and there's some sort of observation about how I'm a woman," she said.

Mak prides herself on exploring new careers and goals. "I'm proud of myself for managing – and I haven't done it well – to challenge myself and not let the dust settle, which I have a fear of," she said.

Already she's planned her next feat: hiking the entire 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail this year.



Donna Catalfamo

Euphoria Salon and Day Spas

***Working Hard,
Chasing a Dream***

Donna Catalfamo's mother gave her an early glimpse at entrepreneurship and the beauty industry. After emigrating from Germany to Northern California in the late 1950s, Catalfamo's mother became a licensed hairstylist and purchased two salons. "I remember sitting on the floor, taking papers off the perm rods," Donna Catalfamo, 51, said. "I had a huge liking for that industry. I found it fun to be around and involved in."

Today, Catalfamo runs Euphoria Salon and Day Spas, which has 10 locations throughout Southern Nevada and plans for more. Two of the 10 are day spas; the other eight are salons that offer some spa services. The company has about 600 workers, primarily subcontractors.

"This for me is not about making a good living," she said. "This to me is being very passionate about the industry. I love the technicians. I like being in the operations, and I like interacting with the staff."

Her daughters also work in the business. Carrie, 22, works in accounting and Crystal, 23, manages one of the facilities. Catalfamo's three partners started Euphoria in 1991. They sought her out to manage and grow the business.

"I run operations and have from the start, which means that I clean toilets and do it all," she said. "I'm not afraid to get dirty." Today, while the partners are still involved, Catalfamo and her husband own nearly 97 percent of Euphoria.

Being a woman is advantageous in Catalfamo's industry, she said, as they can relate to haircuts, coloring and the like. It's also fun, as the industry is female-dominated.

In the past when the company had three hotel properties (they've since been sold), she occasionally met with their executives, whom she felt questioned her credibility. "I always got the feeling they were looking at me like, 'You're a woman, what do you know?' It's been very difficult in certain situations," she said.

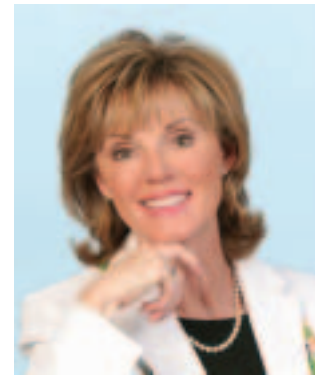
Occasionally she has had male clients try to bully her, without success. "I don't back down," she said. "I stand behind my principles and

what's right. I don't let somebody intimidate me because they're a man as opposed to a woman."

Her biggest challenge, however, is dealing with unfounded rumors, like the one hinting the company was being sold. "Those are difficult to overcome," she said. "As long as you can handle or fix things, you feel comfortable. When you feel like something is out of control, it's very frustrating."

The trying times pale in comparison to the rewards, though. The president enjoys taking care of her employees and giving back to the community. Multiple times a year she holds fundraisers for various groups, including those benefiting women, animals, children and people afflicted with HIV and AIDS.

"I just think that if you work really hard and follow a dream, you're going to be successful," she said. "Anything is possible. It's just a lot of hard work."



Carol Cline-Ong
MDL Group

*Passionate About
Community Involvement*

Carol Cline-Ong, 51, lives by her advice for young women: follow your passion and give back. "If what you're doing isn't your passion, don't do it anymore," she said. "Life is too short. Make a difference by helping somebody else. Get involved."

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This Henderson native runs the day-to-day operations of MDL Group, a Las Vegas-based commercial brokerage and property management firm. She started the company in 1989 with her partner, Curt Anderson, a broker and certified public accountant.

"I truly love every aspect of what I do," she said. "There is no such thing as 'just another day at the office' around here, and I am honored to be a part of it."

The company, with 27 employees, manages 4 million square feet of property. In 2006, the company's total sales and lease volume was \$39.3 million. "It's been wonderful," Cline-Ong said. "The people who work with me, my partner and the clients who trust in our abilities deserve the credit for MDL Group's true success."

Prior to co-founding MDL Group, Cline-Ong worked for more than 10 years as a human resources director for Nevada Title, as well as several years in administration at what was then known as Sign Systems, after graduating from Basic High School, in Henderson, in 1973. Today, the company president has a real estate broker's license, a real properties accreditation and a certified commercial investment accreditation. She is the president of the LIED Institute for Real Estate Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; the treasurer of Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM), the Southern Nevada chapter; and a member of the Builders Owners Management Institute and Vistage, a chief executive officer organization.

She and her company support the Boy Scouts Troop 256, the Nathan Adelson Hospice, the Police Athletic League, Opportunity Village, The 9-11 HelpAmerica Foundation and at-risk schools. "The benefits of self-employment are being able to get involved and make a difference, being a part of paying it forward," she said. Cline-Ong works between 50 and 60

hours a week, and the property management aspect of her business requires her to be on-call around the clock. Consequently, she struggles with finding balance between work and home. "It's tough," she said. "I wish I had the solution."

In her free time, she most enjoys fishing, hunting and hiking with her husband, Kenny, a retired fire department battalion chief, and her son, Kyle, a junior at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, in Prescott, Ariz. Cline-Ong not only is proud of her son and husband, and being a mom, but also of running a successful business. Her intuition and ability to multi-task – women's traits, she said – help her in her work.

She likes that she's "responsible for my own destiny," she said. "The buck does stop here," she added. "If things are going well, great. If things aren't going well, I have to look in the mirror and figure it out."



Bonnie Reppert
Home Instead Senior Care

Committed to Caring

The idea for Bonnie Reppert's business grew from a prior personal experience. In the late 1980s, while a single parent of two teenagers, and working full-time, she took in her grandmother who no longer could live on her own. Reppert needed someone to provide

care during the day while she was at work. "My grandmother's biggest fear was going into a nursing home," the 54-year-old said. "It was difficult at that time to find resources."

Later, she decided to pursue a home health care business for the elderly. She was drawn to the franchise, Home Instead Senior Care, because their values aligned with her own. In 1996 she bought the Las Vegas territory franchise. "Not only did I start this new company here in Las Vegas, but also mine was actually one of the first franchise territories sold," she said.

Home Instead Senior Care provides 24-hour services to the elderly, such as personal care assistance, medication reminders, incidental transportation, light housekeeping and companionship. Reppert's franchise employs 95 people and has served more than 2,000 people over the past decade. "The rewarding part of the business is that it allows seniors the opportunity to stay in their homes and have a trusted resource they can rely on," she said.

The franchisee works between 35 and 40 hours a week. Initially, she handled everything, she said, working endlessly. She's had to learn to delegate and rely on others. "I am better at managing now," she said.

What she enjoys most about self-employment is the inherent opportunities for personal and financial growth. "I like being able to control my own destiny," she said. "What I find exciting is [the work] is not routine. I have the ability to get involved in all aspects of the business, from accounting to management to technology." Also satisfying is being able to provide a good workplace for her employees, one where they feel positive about their contributions and also one that's enjoyable.

Reppert's greatest accomplishment, however, is her children – Luke, 34, and Molly, 36. "They've grown up to be responsible individuals with great character," she said.

She has three grandchildren, whom she adores being with. Other pastimes include gardening and walking her shih-tzu-mix dog.

To any aspiring entrepreneurs, Repert advises choosing the right business and knowing your strengths and weaknesses. "You have to have a

strong belief in yourself and your company," she added. "You have to be willing to take responsibility. You have to be very committed, have a passion and love what you do." ❁

Doresa Banning is a freelance writer based in Northern Nevada.

Dana Dye: Reaches the Top of Nursing Profession



To say that Dana Dye wears many hats is a like saying Lake Tahoe gets a bit of snow in the winter. As chief nursing officer (CNO), for Renown Health, she is responsible for overseeing nursing practices in all the facilities associated with the Renown network which includes four hospitals, eight medical groups, and several additional healthcare facilities throughout Northern Nevada. As chief operating officer for Renown Regional Medical Center, Dye's responsibilities include overseeing all operations for the Regional Medical Center, including all clinical and non-clinical departments.

For Dye, though, her first title is that of registered nurse (RN), which is where she started out more than 20 years ago, and which continues to be a focus for her even as a hospital admin-

istrator. "Nursing governs the largest number of people within any hospital," she said, adding that the issues nurses face are not that different from every other department. "We all struggle with recruitment of employees in our healthcare environment. So many of the issues are the same."

Dye came to Renown almost two years ago. A friend, who was a recruiter, told her about the CNO position in Reno and urged her to apply because it seemed like a good fit. During the interview process, she traveled to Reno and was given the opportunity to meet with many of the hospital staff in addition to senior leadership. She was impressed with the vision of Renown Health's president and CEO, Jim Miller, in building a healthcare network focused on meeting healthcare challenges in innovative ways, with an emphasis on using the clinicians' vantage point to understand what the community needs. The clincher, though, was interviewing with a group of staff nurses. "We have staff nurses who participate in shared governance, and interviewing with them, and having them tell me about their mission to become a magnet facility – it was staff-driven. Hospitals all over the country are trying to get this certification from the American Nurses Credentialing Center. They only give it to 10 percent of the facilities in the country and mostly you hear about administrators or management pressing to get this certification. This was staff-driven. And I thought, 'Wow, this is incredible,'" she said, deciding at that point to make the move to Reno.

The move into administration, though not a common one for a nurse, came easily and almost accidentally to Dye. She was working at a community hospital in Kansas City as manager of the telemetry unit when the current CNO was called into service in the Gulf War. The CEO convinced her to take the position on an interim basis, but when the CNO returned, she decided to retire and Dye stepped into administration on a permanent basis. She credits her CEO from Kansas City with giving her the best advice she could have received: to return to school and earn her masters in public administration with an emphasis on healthcare administration, which she did. "I was blessed by attending a great program and having a great program to help push me along this path," she said.

Almost two years down the road, Dye is still thrilled with Renown and its commitment to not only provide the best healthcare for the community, but also create a great place to work for the staff. "I have not been disappointed one day," said Dye.

Diane Glazman is a freelance writer based in California.

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