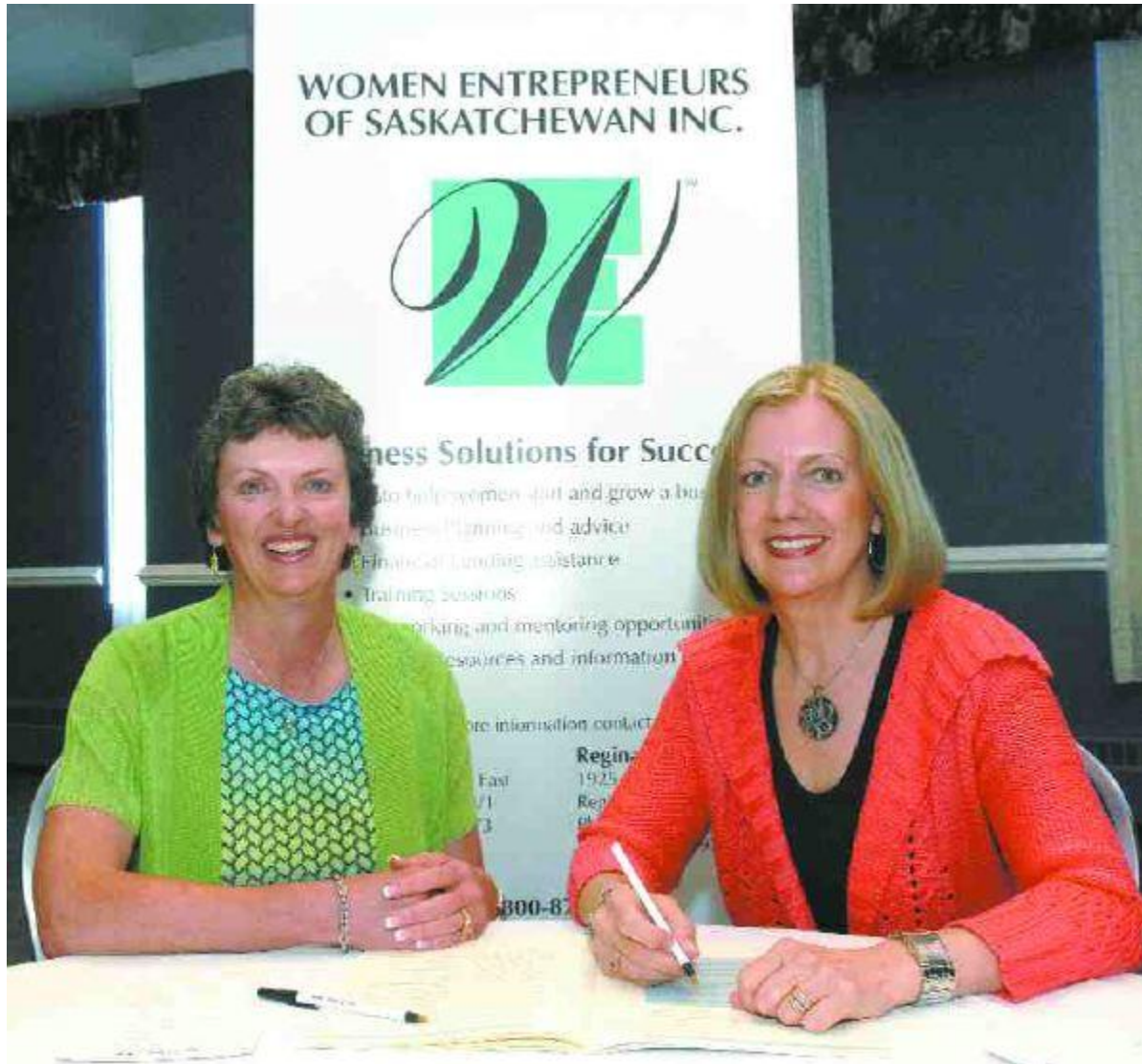


# Opening doors to success

By Bruce Johnstone, Leader-Post May 21, 2010



Laura Small (left) is CEO of Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan and Betty Wood is head of certification for WEConnect Canada, a newly launched Canadian non-profit organization that qualifies firms that are owned, managed and controlled by women.

Photograph by: ROY ANTAL, Leader Post, Leader-Post

Women-owned businesses make up about one-third of the small and medium-sized businesses in Canada, and women are starting businesses faster than their male counterparts, but they're not growing as fast as male-owned businesses.

"Women are starting businesses much more quickly than men, but they're not growing their businesses as quickly as men are," said Betty Wood, head of certification and programs for WEConnect Canada.

As a result, women entrepreneurs are getting shut out of lucrative corporate supply and government procurement contracts worth billions of dollars annually.

"Less than five per cent of large corporate and government contracts are let out to women-owned businesses," said Wood, a former director of the women entrepreneurs' program at Royal Bank of Canada.

WEConnect Canada which is supported by Status of Women Canada and corporate donations, wants to change that.

"This is an initiative to allow them to gain access to that market in particular," Wood said in an interview following WEConnect Canada's official launch in Regina Thursday.

WEConnect Canada is a new non-profit organization that qualifies firms that are at least 51-percent owned, managed and operated by women. WEConnect then links them to the multi-billion-dollar public and private sector procurement and supply network.

"It's gaining access to that network of corporate (and government) suppliers that's important. What we're providing is direct access to corporate buyers. They'll have an opportunity to target the companies they want to sell to," Wood said.

"It's getting to the table ... that's what it's about."

Of course, once they get there, women-owned businesses must have the same high quality of goods and services as their competitors. WEConnect will also help women entrepreneurs get their businesses prepared to bid on -- and win -- these major contracts.

"We have a training program called 'Road to Success,' which is around getting ready for supply chain opportunities," Wood said. That's also where groups like Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc., come into play.

Laura Small, CEO of Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan, said her organization is working with WEConnect to get women-owned businesses geared up to bid on large-scale contracts.

"We see it as great partnership because we're here to help grow their businesses," Small said. "We will be working in partnership with WEConnect on the certification process, help with training delivery and our regular programs and services will help those clients get ready..."

Wood said women-owned businesses have to prove they are, in fact, majority-owned and controlled by women in order to get access to "supplier diversity" contracts. Supplier diversity programs encourage the use of minority or women-owned businesses as suppliers.

"In the U.S., there are 1,000 companies that have supplier diversity programs," Wood said. American women-owned businesses employ 19 million people and generate \$2.5 trillion US in sales. In Canada, there are 821,000 women entrepreneurs, who employ 1.7 million Canadians and generate in excess of \$18 billion to the Canadian economy.

As an affiliate of WEConnect International, WEConnect Canada can open doors for women-owned businesses, not just in Canada and the U.S., but globally.

"It's creating a global network of women-owned business enterprises who want to grow their business and have access to export markets," Wood said.

For more information, visit [www.WEConnectCanada.org](http://www.WEConnectCanada.org).

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