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The Doyenne Group offers support for female entrepreneurs

Lean in, locally

BY **LIZ MERFELD** APRIL 25, 2013 2:00 PM

Next time you're at an entrepreneurial event, count the number of women in the room. Wondering why there are so few? Heather Wentler and Amy Gannon have some ideas.

Founders of the **Doyenne Group**, which aims to support female entrepreneurs, Wentler and Gannon questioned women about their conspicuous absence from networking and business-building events.

Wentler, who also runs the STEM enrichment program Fractal and the micro-funding dinner night MadisonSOUP, says one reason is that, with limited free time, many women put the role of mother or partner first.

Another reason, she says, is that "we're not looking to be hit on!" Many women avoid these events because the moment it's revealed they aren't single, "the conversation abruptly ends."

Finally, Wentler explains, women spend much of the day defending their business to themselves or clients and don't feel like "giving our elevator pitch again and again to strangers who always have that one piece of advice they think we haven't already thought of a million times."

This was her impetus for creating the Doyenne Group last July with Gannon, an assistant professor in the School of Business at Edgewood College. As Wentler tells it, "We were tired of being one of five or so women in the room. We knew there were more women running businesses in Madison, and we wondered why they weren't more present."

Through monthly meetings, learning groups and social events, the Doyenne Group aims to provide a space where business conversations are meaningful and supportive. In February it hosted a Design-a-Thon, similar to Startup Weekend, for women new to entrepreneurship to receive feedback on a specific business pitch.

On June 21²³, it's hosting a Strategic Retreat at the American Family campus for established women-led companies. These are companies that have already launched and that have at least one female cofounder or top leader.

Those who wish to grow their ventures, take their business in a new direction, expand into new markets, set goals or even just break out of the day-to-day routine "to remember why they love running their business," as Wentler puts it, are invited to apply. Applications are due by May 15, and the cost to attend is \$150.

To keep it personalized, only 10 businesses will be selected, based on their vision of how the retreat might benefit them. Each can bring up to four team members, men or women. Through the weekend, fellow entrepreneurs, accelerators and financing institutions will visit and advise.

The public is invited to a Saturday evening reception, followed by Sunday morning business presentations. Wentler hopes participants will leave with "mentoring, resources and networking opportunities to continue to grow their ventures and become more prominent in the Madison entrepreneur ecosystem."

Applications are at thedoyennegroup.com/doyenne-retreat, and current updates on Twitter [@TheDoyenneGroup](https://twitter.com/TheDoyenneGroup).

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