25 YEAR IMPACT REPORT • 1991–2016

WOMEN’S ECONOMIC VENTURES

WEV 25 YEARS
WEV helps Santa Barbara and Ventura County residents start and grow small businesses with training, loans, and consulting. This report explores and celebrates 25 years of community impact. Founder and CEO Marsha Bailey sat down with Dr. Patrice Rosenthal to tell the story of how WEV started, where it’s been and where it’s going next. The report also describes WEV’s core programs – how they have unfolded, their impact on clients and the community, and the path ahead.

We are proud of our story and delighted to tell it in this report. Looking back and looking forward – we thank our clients, donors, and the community for their partnership over the last 25 years and in the years to come.
WEV-ing a Story of 25 Years of Impact

INTERVIEW WITH MARSHA BAILEY, FOUNDER & CEO

by Patrice Rosenthal, PhD

Congratulations on WEV’s 25th anniversary! It’s a great moment for celebration and reflection. What is WEV’s mission and has that changed since you founded the organization in 1991?

Initially our mission was to ‘help women become economically self-sufficient through entrepreneurship’. And then about 10 years ago we decided that we wanted a broader mission, something more aspirational. The mission now is to ‘create a more equitable and just society through the economic empowerment of women’. This is more inclusive, more about women and power in society and the connections between economics and change. It gave us a bigger horizon, something more to shoot for.

Sustainability is a concept much discussed these days and very differently defined. Certainly the longevity of WEV suggests a sustainable organization. How do you view sustainability in relation to WEV – and what are the most important steps you’ve taken to secure it?

It seems like this is the word on the lips of every funder in the world these days…sustainability. Of course there’s the resource part of sustainability – making sure you have the money and people you need to carry out your mission. But the other part is ensuring that you have the right programs to fulfill a need. If you’re not fulfilling a need, you can have all the money in the world and your organization is not going to be sustainable because people will stop coming to you. So really I perceive sustainability from both sides.

A lot of people in our field – small business development, micro business development – talk about sustainability in terms of self-sufficiency. And by that they mean that, like a business, we’re able to sustain all of our operations from earned income from fees and interest. And that really has not proven to be possible in the US.

I think it is one of the ways in which people need to better understand the whole micro loan industry and how different it is in the US where we make fewer but much bigger loans. We charge much lower interest than loan funds in the developing world where they may be charging anywhere from 40% to 100%, whereas we usually charge in the 12 to 15% range.

Right now, fees make up about 20% of our budget and I’d love to see us get to 40% – which is what the top performers in our industry have achieved, but they typically do a lot more loan volume than we do and don’t provide training or consulting.

Thinking about WEV’s story, what have been the major chapters in the life of the organization so far?

When we started out in ’91, we were one of just a handful of women’s business organizations. There were probably fewer than five organizations in the whole country that were doing peer lending based on the Grameen Bank model. And so we tried that model, making loans of up to $1,500.

There was very little training involved with it. “Here’s an outline of a business plan. It would be good if you wrote one!” And we had all kinds of problems with that. For one thing, peer groups sound simple but when you live in a very diverse and very mobile society, putting together groups of five people who were truly peers was very difficult. The second thing we found out was that a $1,500 loan was really not enough for what most people needed. And the third thing is that we started getting phone calls from people saying “I heard you had this loan program for women in business and I don’t need a loan, but I really need some training”.

--- continued on page 6 ---
We were really out ahead of what was happening in the community re-investment area of banks. They didn’t even have a name then for the kind of investment those banks made in our loan fund…”

THE LOAN PROGRAM

WEV is resourceful. The loan program evolves through experimentation, advocacy, and impact...

WEV is a lender of first resort - serving small businesses that don’t qualify for conventional bank financing. The Loan Program exists to provide access to capital to those traditionally under-served by bank lenders. This means low- and moderate-income women and men, and minorities. It also means motivated, creative, gutsy business owners who will diversify and expand the local economy given the right resources.

WEV provides start-up loans of up to $25,000 and expansion loans of up to $50,000. WEV’s pool of capital is a combination of equity loans from local banks and grants from organizations such as the Rotary Foundation and the Women’s Fund of Santa Barbara. WEV has loaned over $4 million to local businesses since the program’s inception in 1995.

The loan program was born of experimentation. When WEV opened its doors in 1991, it was one of a handful of women’s business organizations operating in the US. There was no blueprint for how best to help women start businesses. WEV experimented with the Grameen Model of peer lending used in developing countries. This model did not translate well domestically and so WEV abandoned it and moved on.

Innovation and advocacy came next. In 1994, WEV and seven local banks innovated a completely new model for community re-investment and in the process facilitated a shift in city government funding priorities. Together, the City of Santa Barbara and several local banks injected $300,000 of capital and in 1995 the loan program was born.

Impact followed – and from impact, further growth. “That was the beginning of our bigger loan fund and it was important for a lot of reasons. For one thing, it positioned us in a way in the community that no one else was positioned. There was no other program that was making loans. It also put us on the radar of the banks. And now banks are our biggest corporate donors.” [Marsha Bailey, CEO]

Today WEV’s capital pool stands at $1.4 million. The program is healthy, with a default rate of less than 6% - well within the industry’s prudent standard of 9%. WEV was recently certified by the California Organized Investment Network (COIN), further boosting its reputation and its ability to raise capital.

WEV loans pay off for clients and for the community. Internal research shows that clients who combine a WEV loan with other services have significantly better business outcomes. For example, annual sales of clients who receive a loan in addition to training generate three times the annual sales as those receiving training alone.
Moving forward, WEV looks both to expand its loan portfolio across client groups and scale impact through a growing focus on larger loans to higher growth businesses.

WEV’s loan program differs from conventional commercial banking in ways beyond its ‘lender of first resort’ mission. Alongside working capital, WEV makes an investment of an equally powerful kind - relationship. WEV views itself as a long-term partner to its loan clients, ready with training, support, and advice if needed.

Director of Lending Devon Johnson illustrates the difference between her work with loan clients at WEV and her experience in commercial banking. “Here at WEV, it feels like a partnership, it feels like family.”

Through twenty-five years of experimentation, advocacy and impact, WEV has positioned itself as a trusted, non-profit local community lender.

“When you have a loan, WEV stays with you, they partner with you, they support you. WEV reminds me of Bailey Savings and Loan in that film ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’.”

JILL-MARIE CARRE, CHOCOLATS DU CALIBRESSAN
SANTA BARBARA / CARPINTERIA

“WEV taught me to believe I was fully capable of running my own business.”

MARIA DURANT, DANCE 4 WELLNESS
WESTLAKE VILLAGE
www.dance4wellness.net

With years of experience as a dance instructor, Maria decided to teach dance on her own terms. She started her business in 2008 after taking the Self-Employment Training course. In six months, Maria’s sales were double the yearly income from her previous job. She joined Thrive in Five® and in 2014 received a $25,000 expansion loan from WEV. Her sales have increased exponentially since coming to WEV and she has created five jobs.

“When I went back to WEV for a second loan, the business counselor thought that with my track record, I’d be able to qualify for a conventional bank loan, and I did.”

ZDENA JIROUTOVA, ZFOLIO
SOLVANG / MONTEREY • www.zfolio.com

Zdena was raised in a small farming village behind the Iron Curtain in what is now the Czech Republic. She launched her Solvang gallery in 2003. A year later, when she couldn’t get a bank loan to increase her inventory of fine art glass, she came to WEV and received a $20,000 loan. Since then, she has opened a new location in Monterey, and now generates over $2 million in annual sales with 14 employees.
Aspiring business owners need working knowledge. They need confidence, a sense of personal agency. And they need a viable plan to translate an idea into a venture. Self-Employment Training (SET), WEV’s core training program, helps clients develop all three.

SET is a 14-week course covering the major aspects of operating a business – organizing, financing, marketing and management. Learning takes place in classrooms of 25 students or fewer. Participants enter with ideas and questions about whether and how to start a business. Graduates leave with knowledge, skills, and a business plan.

SET has a rich history. Early on, WEV was mainly a lender. Listening to its clients, WEV came to a realization. The empowerment of women through entrepreneurship required access to knowledge and social capital at least as much as financial capital. A trailblazer in the field of micro business development, WEV moved to offer both lending and training services.

Enter SET. As Founder and CEO Marsha Bailey explains, at the time of WEV’s inception, “The ‘All Women’ classroom concept was important. It was strategic, mindful – in order to provide a context of safety, where women would not have to compete for attention, for room to speak”.

“We started getting phone calls from people saying, ‘I heard you had a loan program for women in business and I don’t need a loan, but I really need some training.’”

SELF-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING
AND SET TO LAUNCH

WEV develops. The core training program is launched, matures, and keeps evolving…

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OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS, SET PARTICIPANTS HAVE STARTED NEARLY 2,000 NEW BUSINESSES.

“WEV helped me to write my business plan which, in turn, enabled me to get my business loan, and open my doors!”

AMY DIXON, THE BAKER’S TABLE
SANTA YNEZ
www.thebakers-table.com

After graduating from culinary school, Amy worked in restaurants preparing desserts and in catering. She decided she wanted to have a bakery and café of her own and utilized WEV’s Self-Employment Training course in 2010 to get her business off the ground. Her best advice to aspiring business owners is to be tenacious!
The present-day course has evolved from experimentation with various delivery models, materials, and approaches. WEV worked (and keeps working) to find the right balance of challenge and support; hard and soft skills; expert guidance and self-directed learning. And men are now welcome. Fifteen percent of WEV clients are male.

Since inception, 4,000 women and men have participated in SET, and the program delivers. Half of pre-business SET clients go on to start a business 12-18 months after participating. And of SET participants in poverty, 81% move out of poverty within 12-18 months of completing the program.

Evidence shows that clients who use more WEV services see better outcomes. SET has impact on its own but is significantly more powerful when paired with a loan and/or with further, growth-oriented training from WEV. Businesses of clients who participate in Thrive in Five® in addition to SET generate nearly three times the annual sales of non-Thrive in Five participants.

Looking forward, Program Manager Leah Gonzales explains that SET is following its own advice to clients – when faced with a diverse customer base, segment and tailor services accordingly. SET is now offered in two tracks based on client capacity, interest and urgency to move into business ownership.

Within 12–18 months of participating, half of SET clients increase their annual household income by an average of 40%.

SET to Launch

Moving from plan to action is challenging. Always ready for a challenge, WEV recently developed a new program to help SET graduates take the next step.

To be eligible for SET to Launch, clients must have graduated from SET with a completed business plan, intend to launch within approximately six months, and commit six months to the program. Participants receive individualized analysis and support to validate and implement their business plan. To date, over 60 have participated in the program.

Lisa Champagne-Minyard, Program Manager, calls it “where the rubber meets the road”. The program helps clients calibrate their plans and launch their venture. In some cases, the program helps clients realize they do not want to become business owners, or that they need more work experience in their industry to be better prepared to launch. Most of these clients say the skills they learned from WEV helped them perform better in their job, or secure a better one.

In launching SET, WEV was a trailblazer. In the maturation of SET, WEV has impacted thousands of women and men and the local community. In the future, SET and SET to Launch clients will be served in program streams tailored more closely to their own skills, timing and goals. The impact on clients and on the community should be even more powerful.

“My Master Mind group from my SET class has been meeting once a week since spring 2008. I understand everything about each woman’s business and they understand mine.”

KATHY WERTHEIM, WERTH-IT
VENTURA • www.werth-it.com

Kathy came to WEV in 2008 with decades of experience in fundraising but needing help learning the ropes of being a business owner. The Self-Employment Training course created the foundation she need to start her own business and in 2012 she joined Thrive in Five to help keep her business growing.

“WeV showed me how to make my business vision a reality.”

KAREN BOUBLIS, HR BUSINESS SOLUTIONZ
NEWBURY PARK
www.hrbusinesssolutionz.com

When the company Karen worked for announced a restructuring of its divisions leading to her eventual layoff, she took matters into her own hands. Karen took WEV’s Self-Employment Training course in 2009 and opened her own HR consulting business. She joined Thrive in Five in 2010 and has increased her sales and owner’s draw nearly every year since.
So we created the first iteration of our Self-Employment Training program (SET), which was a six-week course taught entirely by volunteers.

It was three years in before we got any public money. And then we got a $54,000 grant from the Private Industry Council, which was significant for us. It enabled us to double our staff from 1.5 to three whole people! And that made a huge difference for us. We started experimenting with our core training program, SET. We added content, lengthened it, and hired a program manager to teach it. We served more people, we had better outcomes, we had more measurable outcomes.

Success breeds success. So, the more we were able to do and the more we were able to show, then the more money we were able to raise. The next year we got $25,000 from the same source. And that was pretty much it. It got us rolling so that it opened up some other doors for us.

The third chapter has been about diversifying our programs and services and a focus on helping clients grow their businesses. We came to realize that starting a business is a lot like having a baby. Conception is the fun and easy part, followed by nine months of gestation and then really hard labor… and then the hard work really begins!

We realized that clients really needed us after they’d written the business plan. They needed us to be there to help them launch the business, to help them grow the business. So this is how our program is evolving – to provide in fact more intensive service as their businesses grow. SET, our core training program is where we still see the most clients, but then we have clients in SET to Launch, we have clients in Thrive in Five. We are quite unique in that way, in providing that level of long-term service.

Who are WEV’s clients – and has this changed substantially over the years?

You know, I’d say yes and no. I think our clients’ expectations have changed – because the world has changed in the last 25 years. In 1991, we saw a lot more of what we would now call necessity entrepreneurs. Women who just had tried everything they could try and had not been able to find a job. So they decided to make one for themselves. We are coming out of another severe recession and so we still serve clients in similar situations.

But more often what we’ve seen over the years is women coming to us who have a full-time job and are interested in starting a business on the side. Some want a part-time business to augment their day job. But many of our clients today are interested in growing businesses that can eventually replace their jobs and enable them to earn more money. Only 2% of woman-owned businesses achieve a million dollars in annual sales. We’d like to help more of our clients achieve that benchmark.

How would you characterize the relationship between WEV and its clients?

One of our clients described us as a cross between a boot camp and an all-you-can-eat buffet. I love that characterization! I think we’ve evolved over time. I think there’s that very caring, compassionate, supportive, cheerleading part of us. And the other side is serious, the disciplinarian with high expectations.

People often have used the old saying “If you want to feed a person for a day give them a fish and if you want to feed them for a lifetime, you teach them how to fish”. That’s very much where WEV comes from. Teaching women how to fish.

But we do that from a point of view that acknowledges that women already have a lot of skills when they come to us. It’s amazing what women do with few resources. And so instead of taking a point of view that says you are lacking something, which I think society still does, we say instead, ‘you have a lot of great skills already. You might not know what to call them, what they are called in a business context, but you have them’.

Over the years we’ve shifted somewhat into trying to push harder, to try to get women to think bigger. I think women should define success for themselves. But I also think we should acknowledge that sometimes women’s world views are limited by their environment. So when they are in an environment here that’s very supportive, we want that environment to say, “you know, there might be more out there for you than what you can see at the moment”.

continued from page 1
So is your relationship with your clients of pretty short duration? Or long? Or it depends?

It depends on what the client wants. But one of the things that we have learned through research is that the longer our engagement with the client the better the outcomes are going to be.

You are in the Impact business. Impact and outcomes in the microenterprise development field are measured in a range of ways. To you personally, what are the most important types of impact?

For me personally, the most important measure is movement out of poverty. That is something that is really special to both the microenterprise field and the Women’s Business Center program supported by the Small Business Administration (SBA). We are one of the only widespread business development programs that has poverty alleviation as part of our mission. It’s really what got me so interested in economic development for women in the first place. I felt very strongly that it was important for women to have more money of their own. And having more money would give them more freedom and options in life. And that eventually, we would have more power throughout society. One of the things I think is very exciting about business development is that if you do it well, it also builds leadership skills and those skills transfer into other parts of our society. Business, for me, I think of it as a means to an end. It’s not the end in itself.

I think that any interesting story contains reversals, periods of danger and periods of struggle. Have there been such periods that stand out for you? How did WEV escape and go on?

Interestingly enough, WEV was born amid a lot of conflict. We started out as the Women’s Community Building Project. I became chair of the board and under my leadership we decided to sell our building and use the money that we made from the sale to launch the programs that have become WEV. There was a lot of conflict over this with the other women’s organizations that operated from the building. It was a difficult time, very difficult. But women kept coming to the program. And as the program grew, that was all the validation that I needed.

Another period of struggle was shortly after this time. We had a year where we missed our fundraising goals by a pretty big margin. Some board members wanted us to shut down. And I refused. I felt like there was some momentum going. We had just gotten one or two grants. And so it came to a head. It was very confrontational. At that point I made it clear that I was not willing to shut down the organization.

What about major leaps forward? Is there any decision or event or moment that stands out as the major positive turning point for WEV? Was it the grants in the early years?

One of the really significant moments for us was getting a $75,000 commitment from the City of Santa Barbara for our loan fund. That involved a successful campaign to shift City Council priorities — it was my first taste of advocacy. We also had seven local banks who had come to the table with matching money. With these banks, we innovated a completely new model of community re-investment. They didn’t have a name then for the kind of investment those banks made in our loan fund.

So that was the beginning of our current loan fund and it was important for a lot of reasons. For one thing, it positioned us in a way in the community that no one else was positioned. There was no other program in the area that was making loans. So we had capital. And that made us really different. It also put us on the radar of the banks. And now banks are our biggest corporate donors. We get about $265,000 a year in corporate contributions and they are almost all from banks.

What are the organizational capabilities of WEV that allow for the kinds of things we’ve been talking about?

I think the thing I’m most proud of and the reason we have such a strong staff is the culture. I wanted to create a workplace that was unlike the for-profit workplaces I’d worked in where I’d felt underpaid and undervalued. I wanted to create an environment where women had flexibility. Where they were trusted. Where they were made to feel smart and capable. Where they were invested in and they were paid fairly. And I have all these great people… they don’t work here just because they want a job. They work here because they have the same commitment and sense of mission about what we do as I have.

“For me personally, the most important measure is movement out of poverty.”
“We understand where our clients are coming from, what they need. We are looking at their challenges and also at their strengths and what they have to offer… and using all that to help them flourish.”

WEV EN ESPAÑOL

WEV adapts. The organization works to tailor services to the needs and aspirations of the Latino community…

WEV’s mission is to create a more equitable and just society through the economic empowerment of women. WEV has long realized that women (or men) are not a homogeneous group. Producing impact requires adapting and responding to diverse client needs.

WEV en Español represents the tailoring of WEV’s services to Spanish speakers and the Latino community in general. Over 40% of the population in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties identify as Latino. In cities like Santa Maria and Oxnard, Latinos represent over 70% of the population. Thirty percent of WEV’s clients are Latino and/or Spanish speaking.

Historically, WEV en Español has mainly meant direct translation of the SET curriculum and classes conducted in Spanish. In recent years, the program has become something more strategic and resourceful. In 2012, WEV received a $240,000 grant of from The Rotary Foundation to fund training and loans for low-income Latinos. The addition of bi-lingual staff who are deeply involved in the Latino community has added important momentum to WEV’s ongoing efforts.

WEV must meet clients where they are. For first- and second- generation low-income Latino clients, this often means a place of relative distrust of institutions, a legacy of informality in business practice and limited use of technology. It also means a place of resilience and perseverance and collective capacity.

“My business has grown more in the five years after I graduated from the Self-Employment Training Program than it did in the first 15 years.”

ESTELA FLORES, STEL HOUSECLEANING
NEWBURY PARK • www.stelhousecleaning.com

More than 20 years ago, Estela escaped an abusive husband and emigrated from Mexico to build a life for herself and her young daughter. In 2004, she took WEV’s Spanish Self-Employment Training course to help stabilize her business. Today her business is going strong with five employees and a loyal client base.
WEV is developing a dual strategy to better serve clients in the Latino community. One arm is to tailor services and the other is to build bridges. Tailoring services is central. Experimentation with different curricula, delivery methods, timing and pricing is ongoing.

Latino clients are more likely to attend business training as couples or families, hence a larger proportion of male clients. WEV has adapted curricular materials to be more culturally appropriate and gender-neutral. In outreach to potential clients, word of mouth, community events and direct mailings have proven more effective than social media and online communication.

WEV is adapting the emphasis and sequencing of training topics to fit and develop existing patterns of entrepreneurship in the Latino community. And WEV is coordinating with other local community organizations, such as SCORE, CAUSE and VCCDC to help clients address life issues that influence business prospects.

As it tailors services, WEV is mindful that the Latino community itself is diverse. WEV is actively exploring how best to respond to the various needs and aspirations within the community.

WEV is seeking to tailor but also to bridge. Partnerships with other community organizations are being developed to connect Spanish- and English-speaking communities. This will broaden the networks of Latino clients – and importantly, educate and enhance the wider business community.

Leticia Sandoval, Spanish Program Coordinator explains, “Our clients have incredible knowledge and wisdom to offer. We want to create spaces for these voices to be heard.”

Nearly half of all WEV en Español client businesses have employees, with an average of three jobs each.
Thrive in Five was launched in 2010 and now serves around 55 clients each year. The program itself is an innovation – a new development model for WEV and for the microenterprise sector as a whole.

Thrive in Five serves entrepreneurs who have launched their venture and need support to stabilize and/or to grow it. The program provides individually tailored, longer-term support for business owners - including one-to-one relationships with business development specialists, consultants and coaches and access to supportive, challenging networks.

As a learning organization, WEV innovates, evaluates, and acts on evidence to keep improving. As the Thrive in Five model unfolded, WEV invested in external research with the first group of clients to test what worked and what needed re-thinking. Various enhancements were made to the program based on that research – including a response to clients’ expressed desire to be held more accountable for acting on their goals and commitments.

The program thrives. Six years in, 132 women and men have participated. The businesses operate in diverse sectors, including retail, construction, consulting and technology. Some clients come to stabilize, some to grow. Size and revenue vary. Thrive in Five businesses include four with over $1 million dollars in annual sales.

“We realized that clients needed us after they’d finished their business plan. They needed us to be there to help them grow their business.”

“I found the support I needed to transition from a single worker to a successful company through WEV.”

LAURA DUNBAR, THE MADISON METHOD, VENTURA
WWW.THEMADISONMETHOD.COM

Laura Dunbar developed The Madison Method after realizing there were limited options for homeowners to engage in the design and building of a remodel or addition project. Since joining Thrive in Five in 2012, WEV has helped her build a network of other local business owners, and created a sanctuary for entrepreneurs to less feel alone in their endeavors.
The program produces. Surveys of 125 clients served since the program’s launch show that median annual sales of Thrive in Five business are $95,000 – increasing by over 240% after receiving services. Over 70% of Thrive in Five® businesses have employees – three on average in addition to the owner. This compares favorably with the national picture, wherein only 10% of all woman-owned businesses have employees (2012 US Census Survey of Small Business Owners).

Enter Thrive in Five High Growth

Not one to rest on its laurels, WEV is innovating further with the development and launch of Thrive in Five High Growth in 2016. This new program targets clients who have experienced just that – high growth – and want more of the same. To be eligible to participate, clients must have achieved 20% annual growth and/or created eight jobs in the past three years.

In this cutting-edge program, clients enjoy the resources of Thrive in Five with some important additions, including bi-annual meetings with an advisory board to access the kind of financial analysis and generative conversation provided by boards of larger companies.

With tailored, supportive, and challenging resources, Thrive in Five High Growth opens a new chapter of big thinking for entrepreneurs and for WEV. Thrive in Five and Thrive in Five High Growth reflect a strategic direction for WEV in its pursuit of ways to scale impact.

“Right now what we are trying to do is go deeper in our own community. As business owners prove their commitment and show that they really want to grow, we want to invest more in those businesses.” [Marsha Bailey, CEO]

These new programs also mirror a more essential, ever present facet of WEV. In the words of Lisa Champagne-Minyard, Program Manager of Thrive in Five, “It’s just us listening to our clients. And our clients tell us what they need.”

“Keeping us on track and helping to make sure we achieve our goals with a strong support system is what Thrive in Five has meant for us. WEV has been there from the beginning, since we began nine years ago. Now, we have the fantastic chance to expand and grow our business to another level, which Thrive in Five has prepared us for.”

JILL-MARIE AND JEAN-MICHEL CARRE, CHOCOLATS DU CALIBRESSAN, CARPINTERIA / SANTA BARBARA WWW.CHOCOCALIBRESSAN.COM

Jill-Marie and Jean-Michel came to WEV in 2007 with 11 years of experience running a successful business in France. They received startup and expansion loans from WEV, and have been Thrive in Five members since the program’s inception. In nine years, the Carres have opened a second location in downtown Santa Barbara and created eight local jobs.

“Through Thrive in Five, I have been able to connect with an expert who has helped me set goals to grow my business, as well as give me fresh ideas. The coaching I have received has pushed me out of my comfort zone and I am able to accomplish the things I need to in order to take my business to the next level.”

LISA GAEDE, CARLYLE SALON AND STYLE BAR, SANTA BARBARA • WWW.CARLYLESALON.COM

Lisa has utilized WEV’s full continuum of support: taking the Self-Employment Training course, receiving a WEV loan, and recently enrolling in Thrive in Five. Since first coming to WEV in 2008, she has created 16 jobs. With the help of her Business Development Specialist, she continues to find ways to expand and build her business.
I think there’s a little dynamic tension…between me and the rest of the staff. One staff member told me once…that the words they most hate to hear coming out of my mouth are – ‘I’ve been thinking’. [Laughter] “Oh my gosh. What does she want us to do now?”

But I think that’s a CEO’s job. Part of your time is spent making sure that what you are doing now is running well. That you are providing high quality services. That you are efficient and effective. But the other part of you always has to be looking ahead. What is the next thing? What can we do better? What can we do more of? Going back to an earlier question…how to make a bigger impact than we are making now?

So we are very much a learning organization. We do a lot of client follow-up research and we use that information to improve programs and launch new ones. We got involved early on with the Aspen Institute’s MicroTest program (now MicroTracker) and are part of a national cohort that provides data on organizational performance and client outcomes. To be effective, we need to know what is happening to our clients. What changes are occurring over time?

I think so many organizations these days claim to be learning organizations but often really aren’t. That’s one of the ways in which WEV is unusual. One of the other ways is that you as founder remain CEO after 25 years. Can you talk a bit about your own personal journey with WEV and what it has meant to you?

I’ve gone through a lot of learning of my own since the beginning. I think one of the reasons…the reason I’m still here is because it’s still fun, it’s still challenging, I get to learn new things. It’s never boring. Just when I think I’ve got a handle on everything, some new situation comes along that I never anticipated.

What’s really great for me now is that we’ve built such a strong staff, a great board, a really strong cadre of volunteers, it frees me up to do more things on a national level. I was appointed to the National Women’s Business Council which provides advice and counsel to the President, Congress and the SBA on issues impacting women-owned businesses. I’ve also chaired the Association of Women’s Business Centers for the last three years and am very proud of the progress we’ve made.

In fact, a bill was just introduced in the Senate that we worked on with the Small Business Committee staff that would increase the grant amount for Women’s Business Centers for the first time in the program’s 27-year history and make some important structural changes, too. So it’s really great to be able to make an impact at that level and again to do things that are challenging.

What would you tell the younger Marsha Bailey as she began her journey with WEV?

It would be “ask for help”. I grew up in a boot-strappy kind of family where you were supposed to be self-sufficient and if you asked for help, well, that meant you needed help. And if you needed help, you were deficient in some way. Right? And so it was very hard for me to ask for help. Not only is asking for help a way to go beyond your own limitations – it also allows other people in.

We are sitting here in WEV’s Santa Barbara office, in a lovely part of town. Where would the Central Coast be without WEV?

It’s possible there could be a lot fewer of some beloved and cherished businesses that have really become part of our community. Businesses like Fresco Café that now is franchised. Chocolats du Calibressan, one of the best chocolatiers in the world, I’d put their chocolate up against any chocolate! C’est Cheese. Those are some of the obvious ones that people know because they’ve been around now for ten to twenty years. But I have to say that one of things that makes me proudest…is that I can walk down the main street of any of the cities we serve and point out business that came to WEV for help.
And I don’t want to take credit for their success in any way. Because to start and operate a business requires so much courage and faith and fortitude and hard work. I’m just happy that we could be there to help them. It’s really down to the entrepreneur. But having a little bit of help, whether it’s a loan, or training, or consulting, or cheerleading – or all of the above – I’m so happy to be able to do that. Because I do know that, particularly when it comes to capital, there are a lot of businesses that wouldn’t be there if they hadn’t been able to get a loan from WEV.

What is WEV’s biggest secret? Is there something that the local community perhaps doesn’t know that it should know? It’s really important for people to understand that we serve business all across the continuum. We target women, but we help men as well. You don’t have to go through a WEV program to get a loan. You don’t have to go through our core training to be Thrive in Five. So there’s a lack of knowledge about the breadth of the programs we offer and how widely available they are.

I think the other thing is – file it under ‘you’re never a prophet in your own land’ category – WEV is very well regarded nationally. We are well known in our field and are considered very innovative because of the programs we’ve developed. WEV is among the top ten women’s business development organizations in the entire country.

The Aspen Institute has described us as their model client. Not only because of our commitment to collecting outcomes data, but because of the way we use it. We share it with our board, our funders and our clients. It’s on our website. We use it in our annual reports.

So I guess those are the secrets!

WEV is an unfinished story. What do you see as the next chapter? What are your main current aspirations and challenges? Where will WEV be in 5 years/10 years time?

I think the biggest challenge for a local organization is always attracting the resources that you need to scale. We are looking at different strategies. You can scale by being a mile wide and an inch deep. By that I mean trying to spread out and serve lots of people. Or you can scale impact by trying to go deeper where you are. And I think right now what we are trying to do is…go deeper in our own community. As business owners prove their commitment and desire to grow, we want to invest more in those businesses.

We also hope to be able to share the programs we’ve developed with other organizations. I think we can have more sustainable impact by licensing our materials. We have done some of that already, and I’m hoping there will be some opportunities for us to do some consulting as well. I think these are ways we can spread our impact beyond our own immediate community.

If somebody asked me 25 years ago, “Did I see this in my future?” I mean, honestly, no. I didn’t know what was going to happen. I was too busy putting one foot in front of the other.

I would like to see us continue to grow. But that answer isn’t going to come just from me. It’s going to come from the rest of the staff and the people who follow me. That’s what I hope my legacy to the organization is…that they don’t feel like anything is so precious that it has to be preserved. The way organizations stay relevant is by growing and changing. That’s what I would hope this organization does.

Thank you so much for telling the story of WEV, which is a wonderful story. I’ll end where I started – by offering congratulations to your staff, to your clients and to you in particular for 25 great years of support to the community and to the cause of women’s empowerment. Thank you Marsha!
CONGRATULATIONS TO WEV ON 25 YEARS OF SUPPORTING WOMEN IN BUSINESS

“Women business leaders are absolutely critical to America’s continued economic success in the 21st century and WEV plays a vital role in supporting these entrepreneurs as they tackle the unique challenges that women face in starting a small business. WEV continues to be a critical partner in our community and I thank them for their outstanding service that has helped so many women attain the skills and tools they need to ensure their business and our local economy thrives.”
— CONGRESSWOMAN LOIS CAPPS

“WEV’s success is due not only to the funds and training they provide to women to get their businesses started, it is their belief in them that builds the confidence women need to succeed. The city of Ventura is proud to be a WEV supporter and as a woman, I am particularly proud.”
— CHERYL HEITMANN
VENTURA CITY COUNCILMEMBER

“My late mother, Naomi Sommer, was an early WEV supporter. She believed in the power of women to be entrepreneurs and realized that not every woman gets the first hand-up from family that she did. She saw that WEV could provide that hand-up. I watched my mother build wealth over time starting from very little. I want to continue her work and help other women be able to do the same.”
— TANA SOMMER-BELIN

“If anything takes a village, it’s starting a business. The WEV staff, instructors, volunteers and donors create an invaluable support system for women to achieve their dreams of business ownership and financial security. I’m proud to have been an early contributor and Board Member and to continue to support WEV as an advisor and donor.”
— GAIL ZANNON, SANTA BARBARA PISTACHIOS

“Women’s Economic Ventures holds a very special place in my heart. I am proud to have served as the President of the Board of Directors and helped the organization grow. Helping women through entrepreneurship, business support and education allows women to become independent and successful in business. In many cases WEV gives women the tools to rise above poverty and believe in themselves. Engaging board members and growing the organization is one of the most important volunteer positions I have ever held.”
— JOAN ROTHENBERG, CFP®
JPR FINANCIAL SERVICES