

WOMENADE USES COLLABORATIVE CLOUT

By Fran Cronin

Philanthropy has long been the dominion of men. Professionally clubby and competitive about status, it is an easy pitch for men to get their buddies to step up and write big checks. Not so with women. Historically less entrenched in professional circles and not as financially flush, women are in the habit of writing small checks to a smattering of favorite causes.

"You never knew if what you gave went to administration or to help a person," says Womenade President Victoria Gonin. Womenade is a non-profit giving circle formed in 2007 over lunch at the Boston Harbor Hotel.

Gonin had philanthropy on her mind and she wanted to bounce ideas off her friends, Meg Burnett, Allison Burroughs and Brenda Reny. They are all financially successful, seasoned professionals in the Boston area.

It was time, Gonin recalls telling them, for women to take advantage of their collective clout and become visible in the world of humanitarianism. The key was to find a model that had both high impact and efficiency.

By the time lunch was over, Womenade Boston was born.

Women have maintained their presence in the workforce despite the most recent recession, and their potential earning power is on the rise. Studies issued by the Center of Philanthropy at Indiana University report that 43 percent of the nation's wealthiest individuals are women with combined assets of \$4.6 trillion.

Longevity and wealth inheritance also favor women. Gonin quotes from the Indiana study: "Because women usually live longer than men, they will end up in charge of much of the anticipated intergenerational transfer of wealth expected over the next 50 years."



L-R: Brenda Reny, Leigh Hurd, Mary Shahian and Tina Kerkam.



Womenade's Victoria Gonin (second from left) and Chris Swistro (far right) join My Life My Choice's Ann Wilkinson, Lisa Goldblatt Grace and Audrey Porter. (Paul Reny photos)

Around the country there is successful precedence to giving circles and Gonin had experience running one in New Jersey before she moved to Boston.

But Womenade Boston was founded with a mission that went beyond simply raising funds and making donations. "It's also about volunteering, networking and educating women," says Renate Rooney, head of Womenade's marketing communications.

In January, at one of Womenade Boston's annual quarterly meetings, commitments for the coming year were in, annual donations made and tallied. Membership for 2012 had climbed to 83, within reach of their goal. This year, Womenade Boston will make grants in two focus areas: local

organizations that empower teen girls at risk; and organizations that keep girls and women engaged in education.

Eight proposals were selected for presentation at Womenade Boston's June meeting for potential funding. Grant recipients are invited to present at the September meeting, which is also Womenade Boston's annual recruiting event.

Last year, one \$25,000 grant was awarded each to Girl's LEAP and My Life My Choice to support their work on behalf of teen girls. ♦

For more information on Womenade Boston, visit the group's website: www.womenadeboston.org.