

National Association of Women Business Owners' NWI Connects Group

Support, Empowerment, and Inspiration

By Cheryl Wooten (Photos provided by NAWBO)



THE WOMEN WHO ATTENDED THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF NWI CONNECTS.



SMILES ALL AROUND AT THE FIRST NWI CONNECTS MEETING IN SEPTEMBER.

Are you a woman business owner looking for leadership, education, and networking opportunities with fellow women business owners? Do you have challenges in your business that are keeping you up at night? If so, let me introduce you to the newest satellite chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO): the NWI Connects Group.

Co-chairs Edie Fienemann and Tiffany Irving, both members of the Chicago Chapter of NAWBO, have recently launched the NWI Connects Group, a satellite of the Chicago chapter. For 18 years, Edie owned a scrap metal business in the Chicago area and is now a real estate broker with McColly Real Estate in Valparaiso. Edie became a NAWBO Chicago chapter member in 2016 and has been on their board since 2018. She has served two terms as president and is the chapter's immediate past president. She also volunteers her time as a SCORE mentor.

Tiffany, Senior Vice President and Wealth Advisor with Mesirow, has spent the last 25 years as a private wealth advisor working with individuals and their families, including women business owners. She's a long-time member of the Women's Impact Fund of the Porter County Community Foundation and a Board Member for the Caring Place. Both women are ready to share their skills and knowledge with other women.

NAWBO's NWI Connects is built on the invaluable relationships women business owners cultivate for support, empowerment, and inspiration. Whether you run a business of one or a business of several hundred, NAWBO exists to help you succeed. Members represent businesses in all major industrial, service, and retail sectors. Resources include regular monthly meetings, a newsletter, video library and more.

Formed in 1978, NAWBO nationally has over 12 million women business owner members. The Chicago chapter is the largest of over 52 chapters in the U.S. In addition to the hands-on guidance and support the group provides, NAWBO also serves as a voice for its members on economic, social, and public policy issues through lobbying activities.

It's a fact that women business owners face their own unique set of challenges. Edie explains. "As much as we want to say it's an even platform, if you're a woman, there are certain disadvantages. And if you're a woman of diversity, that adds another layer of disadvantages, especially in terms of access to capital."

When it comes to inclusion, Edie says, "If you can't find a seat at the table, get your own table! That's what we do. We help women get their own table to keep paving the way for more female entrepreneurs. Being a woman business owner can be very isolating. Being in a male dominated industry and then coming in contact with fellow women business owners who were working collectively for the greater good was very refreshing. This group is warm and inviting and it's something I feel confident in sharing with other women. NAWBO is a safe place to learn and grow."

Tiffany has found NAWBO to be very beneficial to her business and growing her network. "For me, it's the connections with all these exceptional women. When I attended the Chicago annual conference in April, it was a fantastic opportunity to meet other members. It was very peer to peer," she says. "There were many different industries represented and women in various phases of entrepreneurship. When you're growing your own company, you don't know what you don't know; and you often don't know who to ask. This group is about guiding one another to find the resources needed and to support each other regardless of industry."

The NWI Connects group meets from 8:00am - 9:30am the second Wednesday of each month via Zoom. Recent topics presented include how to network, and how to understand income statements, balance sheets, the chart of accounts, fixed assets, cost of goods and more. In upcoming meetings, the group plans to discuss leadership, professional development, marketing, customer relationships and finding local resources.

On December 14 from 5pm-7pm, the NWI Connects group will host a holiday event at Ella Jayms in Valparaiso where members and prospective members are invited to attend. For additional events, visit www.nawbo.org/Chicago.

