

An AWEsome Program for Women

BY ANNA PROCTOR

Women in the Saugeen area are shining a little brighter these days, thanks to an AWEsome webinar series called AWE (Advancing Women Economically), the brainchild of Saugeen Connects.

Saugeen Connects is a partnership between the Saugeen Economic Development Corporation, the Towns of Hanover and Minto, the Township of Wellington North and the Municipalities of Brockton and West Grey. Together, starting back in 2017, these organizations decided to do something about economic development and business in their area, through key projects in succession matching, immigration, youth, and women.

AWE is the latest in the series of life and business changing projects in the Saugeen area. Running weekly from January 25 to March 29, 2021, AWE is a group of virtual webinars designed to help women become empowered, give them useful and marketable business and entrepreneurial skills and help them to become leaders, whatever they chose to do. AWE is partially

funded with monies from Ontario's Rural Economic Development program and coordinated by project coordinator Kate Russell.

Covering everything from ideation, finding customers, marketing, digital marketing, cash flow, creating a positive business image, breaking barriers, and leadership, AWE helps women to overcome challenges and succeed.

Rose Austin, General Manager of the Saugeen Economic Development Corporation, explains, "One of the things we really wanted to address was our women's groups in our area. We put together this webinar series with four different facilitators and the feedback has been very positive."



One of the highlights of the series was a special event on March 8 to highlight International Women's Day, with keynote speaker Diane Crawford. Diane is from the Saugeen area and has grown her own business to a 1.8-billion-dollar operation in the 30 years since she founded The Voyage Inc. She is a professional coach and lifelong learner and teacher.

Rose elaborates, "Diane spoke on removing barriers to success. So, the Five Cs: Confidence, Collaboration, Communication, and Connections...in this time of Covid."

"Our main focus in doing this," Rose continues, "is to advance women who are suffering from various barriers, challenges, be they economic, personal, whatever the

case may be. We have a target group of women: seniors, women on some type of assistance, stay-at-home moms, disabled women, Indigenous women." Of course, Covid-19 has also been a barrier to women's employment in many ways.

In addition, to help overcome barriers, every woman who attends all 10 AWE sessions will receive \$500. Rose explains, "That money could be for internet connectivity, could be for travel, elderly or child care...and if there are none of those barriers present, then they can use those funds for their business, should they chose to start one."

This initial AWE series saw 14 local women attend, with a waiting list of a further 14. "It's a very diverse group. Some have already



started their business, some are just considering it, and some are just looking for those leadership skills.

All the women are very engaged,” says Rose. “They are looking at starting their own Facebook group to stay connected and support each other. We have also partnered with WOWSA,

Women of Wellington and Saugeen Area, a local women’s entrepreneurial group, and WOWSA members are acting as mentors to AWE participants.”

Future plans are to run the program again, and to continue to support women in business or wanting to go into business, in the future. In the meantime, 14 local women

are further ahead in their quest to advance themselves economically, thanks to the AWE program from Saugeen Connects.

For more information about the **AWE Program** visit www.saugeenconnects.com or contact (519) 799-5750.

For more information on **Saugeen Economic Development Corporation** visit www.sbdc.ca or contact (519) 799-5750.

