

Athenian forum for professional women

Athens WING forges connections, provides support in challenging market

BY JULIA PANAYOTOU

Women of any age or nationality who live in Greece and own a business or are just looking for work in this increasingly harsh economic climate will be pleased to know that there is a professional women's organization in Athens.

The idea for Athens Women's International Networking Group (WING) came to two foreign women living in Athens in 2007. Dutch artist and head of the Trinity-Inspiration company Celeste Neelen, now at the head of Athens WING, and Jelena Bralic, who has since moved back to Serbia, realized that Athens had no comparable organization to northern Greece's TOWER (Thessaloniki Organization for Women's Employment and Resources).

"Women who thought they were on their own, facing the difficulties of looking for work, setting up a business or finding their way through the Greek network of laws and rules turned up at our events and were suddenly surrounded by others facing the same challenges and difficulties," says Athens WING organizer Mariel Hacking of attendees' positive responses to the first Athens meeting in December 2007.

Hacking, who is also originally from the Netherlands and runs a holiday center on the Methana peninsula, is joined by other WING organizers Josien Anker, Annalisa Trapani and Polina Tsedenova-Nikopoloulou.

Athens WING started a yearly membership program in 2009. So far, 40 women have signed up, forming a multicultural and diverse group, with nationalities including Greek, American, British, Australian, Dutch, Romanian, Russian, German and French. While non-members are welcome to attend Athens WING events by paying a small guest fee, members, who pay an annual membership payment of 35 euros and can attend all events free of charge, do "not only" have "the advantage of getting to know people in a similar position to their own," but also "present their own services or businesses on our website, put leaflets on the 'networking' table at every event and present their business at our yearly networking market."

Besides the annual open networking market, other WING activities consist of organizing eight annual activities with guest speakers around specific topics, setting up sub-networking groups around themes such as leadership, newcomers and languages, and more.



Visitors peruse the Athens WING Networking and Swap Market, which was held on December 13. At the event, women were able to present and sell their products as well as swap services. (Patricia Munster)

Motivation

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The experience of attending WING's meetings often provides a much-needed catalyst for women in Athens who were stuck in an occupational rut. Says Hacking, "We have had feedback from some women present that those events were the push they needed to indeed go back to work or start a small company of their own."

Future plans in the pipeline for Athens WING are workshops as well as cooperation with both organizations and companies based in Athens and women's organizations in other countries.

"We want to promote self confidence and build a supportive network." Those who "come to Athens WING events are mostly highly educated women, who have difficulty finding an adequate position in the labor market here in Greece. We want to provide help and encouragement so this unused talent will not go lost but instead find a place in Greek society."

NEXT EVENT

'Finding the right job for you'

On March 21 from 10.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m., Athens WING is inviting all women to attend their next event, titled "Finding the Right Job for You and Characteristics of the Greek Job Market." The owner of HR Passport career services, Dimitra Karatolou, will speak about finding the perfect, tailor-fit job, while HR and talent manager at Novartis, Irini Chaviara, will talk about working conditions in Greece as well as ways of staying happy at work. The event will be held at the Danish Institute in Athens (14 Herefontos, Aghias Aikaterinis Sq, Plaka). All women are welcome to the event, and the guest fee is 8 euros. Attendance is free for 2009 Athens WING members. The guest fee is refundable for women who decide to join WING afterward.

To confirm, e-mail info@athenswing.com. For more details, call 210.608.5173, 210.765.8303 or 6947.570.690.

WEBSITE LAUNCHED

Athens WING launched www.athenswing.com on March 12. The aim is for the site to become "a source of information for professional women working and living in Greece," according to Mariel Hacking. The site will have articles on work-related subjects, network information, interesting relevant events in Athens and an extensive database of professionals and businesses in the Greek capital. There will also be a forum so that women can communicate with each other. Additionally, "an important part of the website is that members can present their businesses and services."



NOTICE BOARD

New British ambassador pays visit to Thessaloniki

The new British ambassador to Greece, Dr David Landsman, visited Thessaloniki on March 13 and 14, meeting with Macedonia-Thrace Minister Stavros Kalafatis, Thessaloniki Prefect Panayiotis Psomiadis and Thessaloniki Mayor Vassilis Papageorgopoulos. Dr Landsman, who speaks and writes Greek, studied Classics at the University of Oxford and linguistics at the University of Cambridge, writing his PhD on the "Greek Language Question." Joining the Diplomatic Service in 1989, Landsman was until recently the Foreign & Commonwealth Office Balkans director and replaces Simon Gass as ambassador to Greece.

Young and free? Make yourself useful

With unemployment rates rising, now is as good a time as any to brush up on volunteer and job training. One option is the European Volunteer Service (EVS), aimed at 18- to 30-year-olds who can contact a local volunteer-sending organization, such as nongovernmental EDRA (www.edra-coop.gr). The sending organization will use the candidate's personal skills and interests to find a matching host organization, either within or outside the European Union, and then help the candidate prepare an application. No financial input is expected from candidates taking part in the EVS. Perks include training seminars, mentoring and on-the-job training, food, housing, transport, a stipend (ranging from 60 to 150 euros per month depending on the country), health insurance and a Youth Pass certificate. To find out more on the European Volunteer Service, visit eacea.ec.europa.eu.

Female entrepreneurship & doing business in Russia

A seminar conducted in Greek on female entrepreneurship and success by Iphigenia Paparoussi, MBA, who has worked in the marketing and sales departments of companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestle and Eurobank, will take place on March 27 in Athens (Stratos Vasilikos Hotel, 114 Michalakopoulou) from 4 to 10 p.m. and in Thessaloniki (Hotel Nikopolis, 16-18 Asclepiou) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. An English-language seminar, "Doing Business in Russia and the Ukraine," will be given at the same venues on April 3 in Athens from 4 to 10 p.m. and on April 4 in Thessaloniki from noon to 6 p.m. by businessman and academic Karsten Thies.

For information and applications, visit www.globalgreece.gr or call 2310.474.191.

Famelab 2009 competition

Are you 18 or over? Can you make a three-minute presentation on a scientific topic in front of a live audience and a panel of judges? April 3 is the deadline for the British Council's Famelab 2009 competition. Residents of Greece over the age of 18 who work or study in the fields of science and related areas are all welcome to participate. For details, visit www.britishcouncil.org/gr.

SHARE YOUR STORY
Athens Plus runs regular features on foreigners living in Greece. If you would like to share your story, please send an e-mail to community@athensplus.gr.