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## WIN Conference a success

May 3, 2007  
 By: Brian Albright  
 Automotive Body Repair News

The inaugural Women's Industry Network (WIN) Conference drew more than 100 shop owners, managers, technicians and suppliers to Phoenix, Ariz., earlier this week, and by all accounts the event was a tremendous success.

"We sold out the conference above and beyond our expectations," says WIN secretary Gigi Walker of Walker's Auto Body in Concord, Calif. According to Walker, more than half of the attendees were body shop owners, managers or technicians. "It was the greatest thing to see the interaction of these women who had owned body shops for 20 years with others that were just getting into the industry. The connection was amazing."

The conference was held April 29 to May 1. WIN's mission is to encourage, develop and cultivate opportunities to attract women to the collision repair industry, and the group's leadership includes a number of prominent women in the industry, including executive director Sheila Loftus (of Loftus Information Network), Diane Rodenhouse of Rodenhouse body Shop in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Kathy Mello of TGIF Body Shop in Fremont, Calif.

The conference focused on business strategies, working with local vocational schools, and developing ways to recruit more women into the collision industry.

"There was a lot of discussion about how we, as shop owners, can better portray the image of the industry to young women," Walker says.

Keynote speakers included Susan Hood, claims vice president at State Farm; Mary Mahoney, vice president, national marketing, at Enterprise Rent-A-Car; Marcy Tieger, principal at Symphony Advisors; and Matthew Ohrnstein, managing director at Symphony Advisors.

One of the most popular sessions was one led by Laura Angell, auto collision instructor for Warren Tech Career & Technical High School in Colorado, on working with local vocational schools.

"She really dove into what it will take to get young women from high schools into vo-tech schools," Walker says. "And how important it is to portray auto repair, not just collision repair, as a positive career choice to young people."

Tieger presented a session on the business case for women on the shop floor, and Ohrnstein presented an industry overview.

"Matt Ohrnstein's session really opened everyone's eyes as to what's really going on in the industry," says WIN Chair GERALYNN KOTTSCHADE, co-owner of Jerry's Body Shop in Mankato, Minn. "He talked about the over-capacity of shops, and how prices are reflecting that capacity."

The conference also included sessions on recruiting women, and general sessions on business management strategies. The conference closed with presentations by Akzo Nobel Coatings on management techniques, led by Richard Fifer, services development manager, and Larry Elmore, learning organization manager.

With the conference over, the members of WIN will turn their attention to developing a mentoring program for women in the industry, and expanding the group's Web site with more resource links.

The group is also putting together mentorship, education and membership committees, and plans are underway for the next conference, tentatively scheduled for May 2008. WIN also plans to hold a meeting at the upcoming NACE conference in October.

Walker said she received uniformly positive feedback from attendees on the conference program. The only significant change for next year's conference will be the addition of more sessions for technicians.

For more information, visit [www.womensindustrynetwork.com](http://www.womensindustrynetwork.com).

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