

Panelists empower women to be change makers



Talking about how to get things done when it seems impossible are, from left, Rebecca Bryson, Kathy Haven, Kristin York and Cindy Gustafson. Photos/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Creating change is not always an easy undertaking – whether it’s personal or professional. But if it is to happen, it has to start with the individual.

That was the overriding message Oct. 2 as more than 100 people attended a daylong retreat in Kings Beach.

Women as Change Makers was designed to have an impact on women in the greater Lake Tahoe area by providing a series of diverse workshops. Rayona Sharpnack of the Institute for Women’s Leadership was the keynote speaker, focusing on getting women to not be afraid to make positive changes in their lives.

The breakout sessions included:

- Making the Impossible Possible: Changing Systems Within Systems
- Global Change Makers
- Men as Partners to Women as Change Makers
- Sowing the Seeds of Local Food Systems
- The Art of Storytelling
- Getting it Done: Lessons from Female Innovators and Entrepreneurs.

The all-day event was a fundraiser for **Zawadisha**, an organization started by local Jen Gurecki that provides small loans for items with big impact to women in rural Kenya.

Tenacity and collaboration are two traits that kept surfacing during the Making the Impossible Possible panel discussion.

“It’s not just the how and what. It’s the why. I think women are great persuaders,” Cindy Gustafson, general manager of Tahoe City Public Utility District said. “Persuasion is not just talking, it’s also listening.”

She said to get things done it takes passion, persuasion, patience and persistence.

There was a time when putting in sidewalks in Tahoe City was met with so much resistance that others would have moved on to the next project. Not Gustafson. She put the four P’s to work and eventually got the sidewalks put in.

Joining her in imparting ideas about how to overcome obstacles to get things done were Rebecca Bryson with Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative, Kathy Haven, Bijou Community School two-way immersion program, and Kristin York, Sierra Business Council.

York stressed the need to find common ground to establish a

working relationship so the differences could more easily be overcome.

Bryson has found that stories and emotions can paint a more poignant picture than just a bunch of facts and figures.

Haven touched on needing to know one's audience and change the delivery of the message to suit particular groups.

"Change is scary, but it's the only constant we have," York said. "Sometimes detractors make the project better."

Oftentimes people foresee an idea meaning more work. Coming in willing to do some of the heavy lifting could help the idea come to fruition.



Michelle McLean, from left, SunMie Won and Jana Vanderhaar discuss the importance of local food systems.

In the Sowing the Seeds of Local Food Systems talk the discussion centered on getting back to our agrarian roots.

"A lot of people don't have basic cooking skills," SunMie Won of Slow Food Lake Tahoe said. "A lot of food is heated or just assembled."

Jana Vanderhaar with Verdant Connections and Michelle McLean of the Sierra House Elementary School growing dome project

joined Won in promoting growing food locally.

McLean said parents at the South Shore school didn't think their children would eat what was grown in the dome. At first the kids didn't want to touch the soil, they were scared of bees and worms. They had to be taught this is how food is made – it doesn't just come from a grocery store.

“This is life. It's what we need to get back to,” McLean said.

The program is so successful in its first year full year that students are eagerly eating what they have sown, and no longer have a problem getting dirty to do the work needed to keep the domes alive.

“We've become so far removed from our food that we are scared of processing our own food,” Vanderhaar said.

She raises chickens and rabbits. The former for eggs and meat, and the latter for their meat, as well. She is the one who handles the butchering and preparation of the animals.

While all three admit growing edibles in the Tahoe-Truckee area is challenging, they also pointed out how it can be done with good results. While some in the audience were looking for a sure bet about what to grow and how to do it, the panelists said there is no foolproof way of farming in this climate or elevation, that it is a continual learning experience.

What they also all stressed is the need to know where one's food comes from – and the backyard is the way to ensure it is the freshest.

“Planting seeds really empowers everyone,” Won said.