



Forging links:
Members of the Venus Club make valuable business contacts over coffee and chat.

Photo: IAIN MCGREGOR

Minding each other's businesses

By Nicola Boyes

Once a fortnight they gather at Hamilton's McCaw Lewis and Chapman, the volume and speed of chat growing incrementally as the numbers swell.

"Ohhh, we've never had a man in here before," facilitator Wendy Harris tells the *Waikato Times* photographer, drawing an eruption of laughter from around the table.

He blushes, mutters something about being in his element, then disappears out the door.

This is Venus Club and it's for women only.

Sipping coffee around the table are 12 businesswomen from investment advisers to small business owners, a marketing specialist, business advisers, a recruitment consultant, lawyer, banking business manager and real estate agent.

They are here to network. For three it's their first time. Others have been coming since the Riverside Venus Club started last November.

Dianne Bromhead owns Corporate Relocations Specialists, helping families relocate to Hamilton, says Venus Club was perfect for helping her to network and gain more corporate links.

Today she has been awarded "raver of the month" for getting more members involved.

Members invite others, share experiences and contacts, then follow up with one-on-one raves, where two get to know each other's business.

"There's a strong focus on helping

each other build our business," Ms Harris says. "You might... hear I need a recruitment person or a marketing person and your first thought turns to women in this group."

There are now Venus Clubs in Tauranga, Christchurch, Nelson and Auckland and about 160 members nationally. A second club will start in Hamilton on Tuesday, run out of Crave Cafe in Te Rapa.

Tauranga woman Vanessa Davey is the brain behind the venture, which she set up after running her own business and feeling isolated.

She had attended other business networking groups but found them too structured for women, who she says like to be able to jump in and ask questions and chat, rather than stick to rigid speaking time frames.

"Relationships between women build so much more quickly once we start talking," she says.

The meetings start with each woman talking about their business and giving an update on what they have been doing.

It then moves on to discussing their big wins for the week and generally includes some discussion on promotion or marketing.

The chat flows easily with questions fired from around the table.

Narelle Cameron, a recruitment consultant from Drake, says she found the club through KPMG associate business adviser Jan Gatley, sitting opposite her at the table.

She moved to Hamilton in February. "I've gone from Wellington where I

had really established business networks to here where I didn't really know anyone."

She says the club has been great for learning everything from where to find a decent coffee to which business events to attend.

Her win for the week was being asked to speak to business students at the University of Waikato.

First-timer Lisa Harvey from Bayleys is nervous as she outlines her business. "I didn't expect so many people to be here," she says.

Her win for the week was selling two houses. The group is impressed. Everyone in the group notes how tough it is out there.

Ms Harris' win for the week was her daughter getting an academic achievement award at school. It is illustrative of the demands women in business juggle today.

Ms Davey says women have crazy schedules which is why the groups try to meet between 9am and 10am.

Each club invites only one person from each profession so there is no competition for referrals.

As the meeting draws to a close and the group begins chatting, the volume increases again.

"Women talk twice as much as men anyway. Get them talking about people's businesses and it's amazing," Ms Davey says.

Membership for Venus Club is \$195 for three months or \$350 for six months.

Women interested in joining can email wendy@venusclubs.co.nz.