

# Peace Through Business



*Rwandan women entrepreneurs and their North Carolina mentors: (left to right) Françoise Uwamwezi with her mentor Sheila Ogle, Annette Karenzi with her mentor Monica Smiley, and Sarah Mukandutiye with her mentor Leah Brown. Photo by John Dancer.*

**E**nterprising Women has partnered with the Institute for Economic Empowerment of Women and its PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS program since its inception three years ago.

Its founder, Terry Neese, serves on the magazine's Advisory Board and was inducted into the Enterprising Women Hall of Fame to recognize her work as the co-founder of Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP).

This year I was able to increase the magazine's commitment to the PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS program by volunteering to mentor a Rwandan woman entrepreneur, Annette Karenzi, and to facilitate mentorships for two other Rwandan women who traveled to North Carolina and stayed in the homes of two outstanding women entrepreneurs in our area, Sheila Ogle and Leah Brown.

Annette Karenzi is the owner of Rwanda's first fitness facility for women. At the time of her visit in August, she was also on the verge of opening a bed and breakfast in a 13 bedroom home she had purchased with her husband in the capital city of Kigali.

We had five days to spend together and we wanted to make the most of every day so the schedule was tight. We planned visits to several local fitness facilities in the Cary and Raleigh, NC area—some larger fitness clubs just to open up the possibilities for expansion, and some smaller clubs that had challenges similar to those Annette faced in Kigali.

We tapped into the resources of our local Women Presidents Organization (WPO) Chapter. Various members stepped up to host Annette and her colleagues to discuss accounting and marketing issues. One member helped analyze Annette's Web site needs and conducted on-the-spot research on the best way for her to gain Web visibility for her new bed and breakfast.

All three Rwandan women came to our monthly WPO meeting, where they were treated like royalty and actively participated in the discussion. They later confided that they were amazed by the level of trust that American women entrepreneurs placed in one another and how open we were about discussing our business problems. They vowed to carry that model of support back to Rwanda.

Françoise Uwamwezi and Sarah Mukandutiye traveled with Annette to North Carolina for their five-day mentorship. Françoise was mentored by Sheila Ogle, an outstanding woman entrepreneur based in Cary who owns The Matthews House, MRPP (an advertising agency), and several other local businesses. The two hit it off immediately.

Sheila welcomed Françoise into her home, which is a beautifully restored Victorian house in downtown Cary that is listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings. Just a few blocks away, The Matthews House hosts weddings and other events, and her advertising agency is just a short walk away.

Françoise owns a furniture manufacturing company in Rwanda, designing and building exquisite pieces and displaying them in a showroom. She had the idea of opening a bed and breakfast (much like Annette) and filling it with her beautiful furniture. She had already purchased a building in Kigali with that goal in mind. So Sheila planned several tours of area bed and breakfasts, plus devoted one day to the inner workings of her business, The Matthews House.

Sarah Mukandutiye's schedule was perhaps the most challenging of the three with the logistics of her visit. A dairy farmer in Rwanda, we were anxious to pair her with women dairy farmers in our state. Leah Brown, who owns a fast-growing clinical trial support and healthcare service company, ATEN Solutions, Inc., hosted Sarah in her home for part of her stay. We worked closely with Dr. Steve Washburn, a professor in the Department of Animal Science at North Carolina State University, to plan Sarah's itinerary. Three dairy farmers in our region provided tours of their farms and helped Sarah sort through challenges and potential opportunities to help grow her business.

Portia McKnight and Florence Hawley, owners of the Chapel Hill Creamery (and NC State Animal Science grads), invited Sarah to participate in making goat cheese. She accompanied them the following day to the local farmers market, where Sarah was amazed to see people standing in line to purchase the cheese until it was sold out. She planned to go back to Rwanda and research whether cheese might be another potential product offering for her company, and she has a ready mentor in the U.S. standing by to help if she decides to move forward with that business opportunity.

Sarah's current operation includes 75 Ephesian cows which produce about 600 liters of milk a day, and chickens that produce about a thousand eggs a day. She has also begun growing fruit and expects 2010 to be her first productive crop of oranges, pineapples, and macadamia nuts.

Since their visit in August, Sheila, Leah and I have maintained regular contact with our mentees, providing encouragement and problem solving whenever we can. Our commitment as mentors includes continuous contact for a year after their visit, but all of us would confirm that we have made new friends for life.

At a dinner at Sheila Ogle's home on the last night of their stay in North Carolina, we shared what a powerful and important experience it was to be a part of each other's lives. We had been told by our friends at the Institute that the mentors receive more than they give and we all wholeheartedly agreed.

Most of us know that in life, when you open your heart and home to a friend, the blessings you receive are many. When you share your business expertise and life with another woman entrepreneur, the rewards are too bountiful for words.

We are proud to present this global issue with an emphasis on philanthropy and hope that it offers inspiration to our readers in the new year.

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