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THE WOMEN'S EXCHANGE: Local women discuss 'breaking barriers' in work and life

Oct. 10, 2014 @ 05:02 AM

Kathryn Trogon



Submitted photo

Submitted photo Angela Martin, senior enforcement attorney with the Consumer Financial Protections Bureau, was the keynote speaker at the event, and she discussed her experiences as a federal whistleblower to highlight the event's theme of "breaking barriers".

SANFORD — More than 80 local professional women gathered Thursday to discover how their peers are breaking barriers in the business world and how they can do the same in their own lives.

The half-day Women's Exchange conference, hosted by the Sanford Business and Professional Women's Club and held at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center, featured speakers from different business sectors and offered

attendees an opportunity to network with other businesswomen.

Kelly Klug, president of Sanford BPW, said all the speakers tied their discussions in with the event's theme of "breaking barriers"

"Everyone that was here shared something about challenges," she said.

The club, Klug said, couldn't have picked a better keynote speaker to demonstrate breaking barriers than Angela Martin, senior enforcement attorney with the Consumer Federal Protections Bureau. Martin gained national attention as a federal whistleblower when she brought to light instances of being the victim of gender discrimination at the CFPB and was later retaliated against.

"The one thing I never thought I would be called is a whistleblower," she said. "I could not keep silent though."

Many attendees said they enjoyed and learned a lot from the "Women in Business" discussion panel made up of Lauren Parker, marketing manager for Triangle Transit; Leslie Long Cox, owner of Oakleaf in Pittsboro; Ashley Thomas, executive director for BridgellSports; and Tina Gross, owner of Gross Farms in Sanford.

Kelly Miller, city of Sanford public information officer, moderated the panel. She attended the conference last year when N.C. Commerce Secretary Sharon Decker was the keynote speaker, and hearing from both Decker and Martin was a great experience.

"These are women who are where you want to get to, so it's really wonderful to hear about their experiences," she said. "I really love the candor and the honesty that comes out."

Vanessa Colvin-McLaughlin, of Sanford, said what she enjoyed most about the panel was everyone's answers were completely different, because they were all from different professions. Other speakers included Leslie Byrd, owner of Adesso Design, and Sindy Martin, CEO of Smartin International Inc.

After her second year in attendance, Daisha Gaines of Chatham County enjoyed hearing other women's perspectives about how they're handling everything from work to motherhood.

"I have a four-month-old, so it's always nice to hear how they're juggling everything," she said. "I learned never to allow the barriers to stand in your way – to view the obstacle as a learning opportunity."

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