

Group promotes women in biotech

Melissa Frederick, The Examiner
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WASHINGTON -

While women hardly make up the majority of entrepreneurs in the biotechnology arena, many of those who have found success do business in the greater Washington area. Four women in the field came together five years ago to try to ensure there are even more success stories.

The women wanted a place where women entrepreneurs could come together to network and to educate each other. Thus Women in Bio was born.

“One of the reasons was to develop a community where other women could talk to each other about their experiences, and share their ideas and what they think about the business,” said one of its founders, Elizabeth Gray, a D.C.-based partner at the law firm Foley & Lardner LLP, who founded the company Potomac Pharma LLC, which focused on developing drugs to treat schizophrenia.

Women in Bio encompasses the Washington and Baltimore regions, which Shira Kramer, one of the group’s directors, says may have more women biotech entrepreneurs than anywhere else. She said the number of research institutions such as the National Institutes of Health and Johns Hopkins University, as well as the many businesses along the Route 270 corridor are a rich, solid for these firms.

“We’ve just got a very fertile ground here,” said Kramer, who is the owner of two biotechnology companies: Sterilex Corp., which produces infection control products, and Epidemiology International Corp., a research firm, both based in Owings Mills, Md.

Over the past five years, the group has grown to approximately 300 members, said Robbie Melton, the group’s president. A future goal for the group is to expand its reach out of the D.C. and Maryland area, Melton said.

Women in Bio, headquartered in Bethesda, holds forums for startup businesswomen and executives on relevant topics, professional development activities, and training for high school and middle school students to get them interested in biology. The organization also sponsors networking events and an annual dinner.

Women entrepreneurs in the biotechnology field face a host of challenges, Kramer said.

Women don’t always have the same access to capital, or executive skills training opportunities, Kramer said, and have other pulls such as familial ties.

“Most of the time I’m the only woman in a meeting, and if you ask others in the organization, they’ll tell you the same thing,” Kramer said.

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