

Female entrepreneurs

on rise in Hub

By JILL RADSKEN

Boston's come a long way, baby. Ten years ago, female business owners were in a constant losing battle with banks, insurance companies and business groups for support for their endeavors.

Nowadays, banks are loaning, network training programs are booming, and Boston has just been recognized as the best city for female entrepreneurs.

According to a report in this month's Working Woman magazine, female-owned businesses in Boston "are by far the fastest-growing and most prosperous." A compilation of Census Bureau statistics found rate among businesses owned by women in Boston is astounding (561 percent in a five-year period).

Female business owners in Boston are hardly surprised.

"If you have a good idea in Boston and you do it professionally, it should work here," said Lisa Lamme, owner of Le Saucier, a thriving shop and mail-order business in Faneuil Hall.

Irma Mann, president of Irma Mann Strategic Marketing, said the city has provided an energetic environment for her international consulting

work.

"The stimulation in Boston is tremendous," she said. "I wanted a place that would be attractive to an all-around lifestyle. That in itself makes it a little competitive."

Until recent years, Boston's business community has been the ultimate example of the "old boys' network." But these days, experts say changing attitudes and increased opportunities have placed more and more skirts among the stuffed shirts.

"Women in Boston are

now more accepted in the business mainstream," said Marie Record, assistant director of finance at the Small Business Administration. "The climate is right."

Jeff Shuman, professor of management at Bentley College, agreed. "I think we're much more progressive, and I think that opens up a whole lot of opportunity."

Jody Solomon took her chance four years ago when she decided to open Jody Solomon Speakers Bureau Inc. in

the city. The fact that Boston is a college town, said Solomon, made for a perfect work environment.

"If I'm in the business of staying in touch with current topics, it's a great opportunity to hear people speak all over the city," said Solomon, who hires speakers for most every college and university in the state.

Solomon, who has also taken advantage of the SBA's many free programs, added: "I've talked to women who run companies in other

cities, and they don't have the support that Boston offers as far as their small business consultation."

Elaborate networking programs deserve much of the credit for the women's success rate. The SBA's "mentoring" program has helped dozens of new women entrepreneurs network with experienced ones. Mann, who meets monthly with a young fledgling entrepreneur, says women are no longer token members of Boston's business world.

"There's enough role

models in Boston, and these women are accessible and willing to help others to achieve," said a well-established Mann, who has advised her "protege" about everything from budgets and blunders to the big picture.

Mentor Patricia Zinkowski, founder of Flight Time Corp., a worldwide aircraft charter service, agreed.

"We were inventing the wheel," said Zinkowski, recalling her debut into the work world 10 years ago. "Now I want to give something back." □



ROLE MODEL: Patricia Zinkowski of Flight Time Corp. in Brookline is a mentor and helps other women to achieve the same success she enjoys. Staff photo by Ted Fitzgerald