

Herndon CONNECTION

Shop, Network, Help Save the Country Two Herndon friends set out to boost the economy by organizing outings for professional women.

By Mike DiCicco
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It started in February as an idea for a fun trip, shopping with some girlfriends. But even before all the friends were invited, it became something more. Now, Herndon residents Stacy Brooks and Jennell Lynch have turned a simple excursion into the beginning of a full-blown effort to boost the economy by doing what they like best — shopping, networking and having fun.

After the two friends began to plan a trip to southern Virginia, Lynch read a newspaper story about the many small businesses shutting down in Charlottesville. Then, they watched President Obama's speech to Congress, when he urged people to start and support small businesses to bolster the economy. "We literally felt like he was talking to us," Brooks said.

Suddenly, the Right LANEs (Ladies Advancing a New Economy) was born.

"All of this literally happened in like two or three days," Lynch said.

The trip to Charlottesville is now to be the first of many outings to towns all over Virginia, and the invitation to come along is open to professional women from across the area.

Already, Lynch and Brooks have a Web site and about 14 sponsoring businesses. Registration for the trip, scheduled for May 30, is about half full, with a 30-person maximum.

THE THINKING is that if they can get 25 to 30 women to walk into a shop and spend money, that might be enough to sustain the business for the next 60 to 90 days, Lynch said, noting that a small business' operational costs could be only \$1,000 to \$2,000 per month. "We can spend that amount or more in one store at a time, shopping. So the impact is immediate," she said.

Participation also gives women a chance to promote their own small businesses, selling merchandise on the bus, putting literature or donated goods into the gift bags that participants receive and networking during the trip, Brooks said. "We want to be a resource for small businesses, ultimately," she said.

Brooks said she and Lynch also started their endeavor with a goal of supporting nonprofit organizations. All profits — if there are any — will be donated, in this case to Charlottesville's Music Resource Center, a nonprofit focusing on music education. Whether there are any profits to donate, she said, depends on how many sponsors come through. The \$100 registration fee



Photo Contributed

Herndon residents Stacy Brooks and Jennell Lynch are on a mission: to stimulate the economy by having fun.

Get Involved

To learn more about the Right LANES or to register for the coming trip, visit www.therightlanes.com.

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only covers transportation, meals, two seminars, a winery tour and, basically, everything but shopping.

The women have sent letters about their effort to Obama and his wife, as well as local representatives. Lynch said they wanted to make politicians aware of the project to let them know their constituents were doing something about the economic problems facing the country. "We can help each other if we really get together and make things happen," she said.

So far, they have only heard back from Del. Tom Rust (R-86).

"Del. Rust is enthusiastically supporting this group," said Carol Sinclair of Rust's office. She said the delegate appreciated "women banding together and doing something different," as well as the idea of supporting other parts of the state and having fun at the same time. She said Rust hoped the concept would catch on in other places.

Rust is beginning to support the group by working to get the Right LANEs some press coverage in Charlottesville and supplying reusable bags for the women to use while shopping, Sinclair said.

IN ADDITION to shopping, participants in the coming trip can look forward to a tour and wine tasting at Sugarleaf Vineyard, dinner at the "nouveau-Latin" restaurant Mono Loco and two brief seminars, one on stress management and the other on adding new life to one's wardrobe without having to buy new clothes. "They're going to be fun and interactive," Brooks said of the seminars. The stress management seminar will be given by one of Lynch's friends, who is a therapist in Portsmouth. The "Dress for Success" seminar will be given at a boutique in Charlottesville.

Brooks said the two were planning to organize another outing in late summer or early fall and were already looking into small towns in southern Virginia as possible destinations. "We've got people reaching out to us and saying, 'If you come here, we've got this going on,'" she said.

Lynch said they had even received calls from people in places like Philadelphia and New Jersey. "So the excitement around it is really growing." She said she and Brooks were also considering hosting a trip for couples, perhaps sometime next year. Trips like the coming one target women because they focus on shopping, she said, but one that included some sort of adventure outing might be better suited to couples. Meanwhile, she said, "Any men who want to come are more than welcome."

Brooks said overnight trips could also be in the works.

With backgrounds in marketing — they met as communications majors at Norfolk State University — the two friends have been able to get Right LANEs started without any outside help, save Lynch's husband, the graphic designer who created their Web site. "Between us three, we pretty much have everything covered as far as kicking something off," Lynch said, noting that self-sufficiency was advantageous for any group trying to donate its profits.

Also, they have something else in common: They both operate small businesses of her own, in addition to their daily work. Brooks started a T-shirt company with her cousin called Just Teasing, and Lynch runs the marketing

consultant business Egnite Marketing.

In addition to wanting to support small businesses for the sake of the economy, Brooks said she had an emotional attachment to the small business model: "I think it's so important to follow your passion and your dream and to do what you love every day."



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