

Over 450 people attend the 22nd annual Women's Business Conference in Eau Claire



STAFF PHOTO BY MATTHEW BAUGHMAN

Western Dairyland CEO Anna Cardarella said over 450 people registered for the Women's Business Conference this year.

MATTHEW BAUGHMAN

Leader-Telegram staff

EAU CLAIRE — Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council (WDEOC) CEO Anna Cardarella said this Wednesday marked the Women's Business Conference's 22nd year.

"When we started, it was a very small event," she said.

While the conference was hosted throughout spaces and stages at the Pablo Center this year, Cardarella said around 450 attendees registered for the event. Both the WDEOC and Western Wisconsin Women's

Business Center present the event annually in Eau Claire.

From learning how to grow their businesses to networking, market analysis, downtown business tours, an exhibitor area with regional businesses and more, the Women's Business Conference has grown into an all-day event for a wide range of Chippewa Valley business owners.

"It really is a day of involvement for women," Cardarella said. "I've been at Western Dairyland for 21 years, so I've come to a lot of these conferences. And I'll meet people that are coming for the first time, they're just thinking about starting a business or they want

to see what's happening.

"Then the next year, maybe they come back and are volunteering or they're a presenter."

Especially with how much changes throughout the business world from year to year, being able to address relevant topics that entrepreneurs may be interested in.

"AI is becoming a bigger topic that people talk about. It's changing the way we do business," Cardarella said. "It's changing the way we work. And also, technology has changed so much over the years."

Conference/

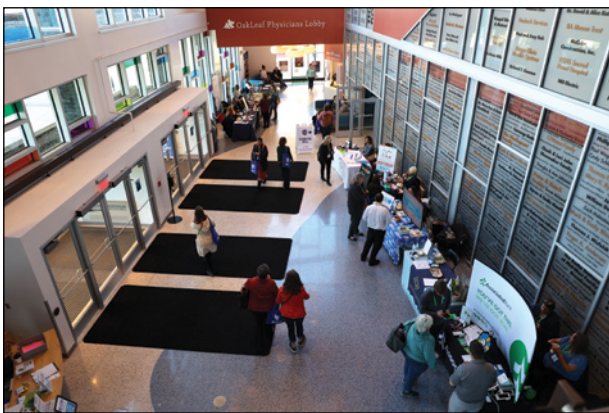
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In working on growing attendance for the conference, Cardarella said this year's volume of attendees is close to pre-COVID numbers. Additionally, Tracey Smiskey, market president at Northwestern Bank, said being able to bring together different businesses and sectors is significant with more and more women-owned businesses opening up in the region.

"And it seems like every year there's more and more," she said. "Not only business owners, but business leaders and community members that are getting involved [with the conference] because the education and the resources are for a broader audience than just the business owner."

Smiskey said this is her 10th year attending the event, being involved and speaking with entrepreneurs both this year and in years prior.

"I've worn all the hats from volunteer to sponsor to speaker, and I've absolutely loved being a part of it," Smiskey said. "Women-owned businesses continue to grow significantly, and this is a great



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While at the 22nd annual Women's Business Conference in Eau Claire, local entrepreneurs, leaders and more were able to attend lectures, meet with other business owners in the Chippewa Valley and see local businesses in an exhibitor area.

day for those business owners to find resources to help them. Our small businesses become our big businesses, so the support and the growth that they get from an event like this can be the next big business in our community doing great things with the employing workforce, and contributing to the growth of the Chippewa Valley, which is really important."

With the event wrapping up its 22nd year, Cardarella commented on the significance in being able to offer these resources and networking opportunities to local entrepreneurs.

"You never know where these connections are

going to come from," she said. "Sometimes it's getting key points in a session, but sometimes you're standing in line for the lunch buffet and it's the entrepreneur next to you that you're making these connections with and learning about things that could change your business."