

LEISURE

# Arts & LIFESTYLES

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# Women's Expo

returns to  
Middle Country Public Library  
October 3 • B17



# Seventh annual Women's Expo to be held at MCPL

## *Holiday shopping plus amazing women equal a real treat on October 3*

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Want to meet phenomenal women? Want to get a jump on your holiday shopping? Then the Middle Country Public Library, Centereach, is the place to be on October 3. The seventh annual Women's Expo will provide a showcase for Long Island women who create and distribute a variety of products, but the real draw is the women themselves. Each has a unique pathway to entrepreneurship and a willingness to share her passion and experience with others. Beyond the 74 women who have been selected as exhibitors this year, you will meet the members of the organizing committee for this joint venture of the Long Island Fund for Women & Girls (LIFWG) and the Middle Country Library Foundation.

The event is a fundraiser, with proceeds supporting the Library's Miller Business Resource Center and the LIFWG's grant-making activities, but that is not its most important mission, said committee co-chairs, Janet Jones and Pat Lupino. It's the collaborative effort and the educational process that is the true goal. "Women get to meet people in the community network that you need in order to do business and get things done on Long Island," said Jones, who has been involved in the annual event since its inception. That's true for attendees as well as exhibitors. It is the ultimate networking venue for Long



Photo by Donna Newman

Donna Hadjipopov.

Island women.

Among the first-time exhibitors this year are seasoned businesswomen, career-changers and start-up entrepreneurs. Donna Hadjipopov's company, Bulgar, markets imported Troyan-style pottery. Her 10-year-old business was "unintentional, but created from the heart," she said. When her husband took her to visit his Bulgarian homeland, "I fell in love

with the people," Hadjipopov said, "and wanted to start a weaving cooperative to help them." To fund it, they imported their first Bulgarian pottery and sold the pieces out in Montauk, where they live. Four years later, Hadjipopov landed a coveted spot at the 2001 New York Gift Show at the Javits Center and the orders really started rolling in. Today, Bulgar pottery is distributed nationwide. The Hadjipopovs

have purchased a factory in Bulgaria and are expanding their line to include a weaving collection: throws, shawls, bedspreads and table runners. Her initial impulse has finally come to fruition. She's grateful to her husband for leading her to this successful venture. "It keeps [his] culture alive. It's beautiful. And it's well received in a broad range of venues," she said. "It's the best work I've ever done."

Shannon Messina of Yellow Cottage Crafts is one of the career-changers. Thanks to a tip from a counselor at the NYS Small Business Administration who suggested they participate in the Women's Expo, she and her mother-in-law and business partner, Elaine, will exhibit their line of decorative hand-painted items. After leaving a position at the World Financial Center in New York City, Messina turned a hobby into a full-time business. The two women had taken art classes together.

Preparing for her wedding in May of 2004, Messina embarked upon her first big project: the creation of favors for her own special day. The wine glasses she painted were so well received that many of the guests placed orders for additional glasses so they could have a whole set. The two have been painting ever since in their studios in Mattituck and Bellport. They can customize items to match a particular theme or color scheme. Up to now they

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# Women's Expo

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have been marketing their creations, which now include a variety of different items, at craft fairs and online, but their hope is to eventually open a shop of their own.

Good friends Maggie Chen, Meg Chen and Jennifer Wu have formed the company Magan J to market Chinese knot jewelry, which they describe as "a kind of auspicious ornament, representing beauty, ideas and best wishes." They started creating the jewelry and other adornments just for fun. "It's something beautiful we can make for ourselves," said Maggie. In their native Taiwan everyone does it, but here, they realized, it was something very special. Using imported cord and cloisonné beads they design and create unique handmade jewelry pieces. Each knot has a meaning. It can symbolize solidarity, reunion, harmony, luck, good fortune, happiness, and longevity. The partners decided to exhibit at the Women's Expo for two reasons. First, so they could share their jewelry with others. Second, to test the market to see if they could turn this time-honored skill into a successful business. In addition to having merchandise for sale at the Expo, they will take orders for customized items as well.

A good number of the exhibitors are returnees. Barbara Moon first came to the Expo two years ago, having read about it in the newspaper. Soon after, she contacted the library to ask if she could apply for a vendor spot for the following year. After the application process, she was offered a space. Moon, a full time librarian, began her needlework in earnest when her husband took a job on Long Island. During the months it took to sell their Texas home, she flew back and forth, knitting all the way. She wound up making more things than she could possibly use herself, and started selling garments to co-workers and friends, enjoying both the creation and the delight of her customers. With the move to Long Island finally accomplished, she turned her attention to accessories for her home and started making those. What she enjoyed the most about last year's Expo experience, and why she's back this year, was "the support network I felt from the other women vendors," she said. "Some shared sources for raw materials. One offered valuable marketing advice about my table display."

Theresa Cohen, purveyor of "All Things African" is also returning. Originally from Ghana, she has been in the United States for 30 years, having married an American she met in Holland. Back in the 1980s she owned a beauty shop. After visits home to Africa, she would return with fabrics and goods that were always in great demand. So it was a natural progression to open a shop that she called Nubian African Market. She imports a wide variety of items, and creates custom African clothes of her own design, including winter jackets for men and women. For years her friends told her she should exhibit at the Women's EXPO and last year, for the first time,

she finally did. "The exposure is great. The whole networking with other women ... I always talk to people. We discuss the fun and the pain of [entrepreneurship]. And the response of the people makes you feel so good. It's nice being noticed," she said. As a sideline, Cohen also does customized African catering.

"This year's Expo is being dedicated to Elena M. Perez, for many years the market development manager and head of community relations for Bank of America on Long Island, who died suddenly just a few months ago at the age of 48," said Middle Country Library Assistant Director Barbara Jordan. "Bank of America has been the lead sponsor for the Expo since its inception and Elena was instrumental in securing support right from the beginning. She remained active and a great fan of the event right up until her death. The planning committee unanimously decided to acknowledge her many contributions by dedicating this year's event to her."

The Women's Expo will run from 11 am to 6 pm at the Middle Country Public Library, 101 Eastwood Boulevard in Centereach. Lunch will be available for sale in the Expo Café from 11 to 3. A Tea at Half-Past-Three author chat and book signing will feature Long Island pediatrician MaryEllen Renna. For information call the Library at 585-9393 extension 296 or visit [www.womensexpoli.org](http://www.womensexpoli.org).

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## On the cover:

Photo by Barbara Jordan

Participants in this year's Women's Expo include from left to right, Theresa Cohen, Janet Jones, Fengyu Wu, Yi-Shuang Chen, Elizabeth Malafi, Barbara Moon, Shannon Messina, Donna Hadjipopov and Pat Lupino.



Photo by Barbara Jordan

Barbara Moon.