

Women's leadership conference all about Creating the Balance

MURFREESBORO — Created as a way to inspire and motivate local women in business, the Creating the Balance women's leadership conference held Friday at the Embassy Suites and Conference Center offered a variety of ways to learn and improve themselves.

From captivating speakers and breakout discussions to area vendors offering services and giveaways, attendees were encouraged to network, share and find friendship with other female professionals who share the struggles of balancing a career, home, family and more.

The ninth annual conference hosted by the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce was sold out this year, proving its popularity among the women in business of Rutherford County.

Offering ladies attending the conference free trigger-point massages, the staff at Riverview Family Chiropractic made connections quickly.

"We are trying to help women find their balance, basically, physically," said Terri Hesemann, who works at the chiropractic office. "Women try to do too much, and we

take on too much trying to do things for others. Sometimes you need to realign yourself."

Lori Sain-Smith of Reeves-Sain Drug Store was looking forward to the conference celebrating women in business as it gave them a safe place to be themselves and realize they are all in the same positions.

"Women place a lot of pressure on themselves. They tend to be perfectionists and feel that they need to be perfect in all areas of their lives. Events like this one make it okay to be great at some things and just okay at others," she said.

Following registration, attendees made their way into the main ballroom for a early morning pep talk and motivation for what they would experience throughout the day. Then everyone broke up into three groups to attend the breakout sessions.

Norma Piatt of Nissan wandered the vendor booths after her first workshop, "Social Nudity: Uncovering the Naked Truth about Social Media."

"It was interesting. They discussed how women need to be more confident and positive. We often take on the role of taking care of everyone around, us but we rarely focus on ourselves," Piatt said.

The second session started shortly after, and one of the conference's popular breakout portions — "Leave Your Crazy in the Parking Lot" — began with moderator Jill Spry of State Farm saying, "We've all got a lot of crazy going on!"

A panel of licensed therapists answered the audience's questions about how to help comfort and console others, but how to be confident and "selfish" when taking care of their own mental and emotional health.

Panel participant Janice Barkley of Barkley and Associates likened women hiding their feelings to a cluttered closet.

"You just keep putting things in there — boots, umbrella — and then one day you realize you have so much in there you don't know where to begin organizing it so you just ignore it," she said. "Talking to a therapist can help you take back control."

She also suggested that women schedule time-outs for themselves.

"No one has time to take care of themselves. You have to make time. Carve out something in your life, and create some time for yourself," Barkley said.

Conference goers made their way to lunch and were entertained by featured guest speaker Kelly Swanson, a professional "storyteller" and motivational speaker.

"We live in a world that makes us believe in the fairy tale, that if you do everything right, you'll get the dream," she said. "Most of us are at the point when the life you want meets the one you got."

Telling hilarious stories of her crazy family members, bad days in high school and how her Southernisms go over in other states, Swanson had the audience wiping tears from laughter or on the edge of their seats in silent interest.

"Happy is a choice, and if you choose it enough, one day you will wake up and it is a reality," Swanson said.

Swanson encouraged women to celebrate their accomplishments and remember three little words, "See. Believe. Do." She said women should see their own talents and personal successes and set realistic goals based individually rather than on

others, and then believe that you can accomplish the goals you set, which would make the "Do" so much easier.

"This is wonderful, hearing speakers from different walks of life who essentially are saying similar things. It resonates with you," said Brittany Wright with Allstate, who attended the conference for the first time.

"I feel so empowered after I leave these sessions and being around other women who are professionals like myself," said Melia Jett of eAllen Boutique.

The final breakout session began and the scent of spices wafted through the air as staff from Smyrna's Simplicity Gourmet International served up Thai chicken and cashews with rice during "The Simplicity of Following Your Dream," explaining how women can get inspired and take marketable ideas out of the head and into the mainstream.

Ann Hoke of Keller Williams was one of the founders of the Creating the Balance conference. It was her hope to inspire and motivate women to do and be their best in business whether it was one they created or one they were employed by.

"Women are different than men," she said. "We have different needs. This conference is about bringing balance to your life mentally, emotionally, and physically. To balance those out takes a lot of good habits, but you can always be better."

The conference, which sold out this year, was attended by approximately 320 people.