

# Driving retail: The power of women

## ■ Women own nearly half of businesses at the growing Orchard Mall

At a time when it's mostly bad news coming out of Detroit, the retailers in the Orchard Mall northwest of the Motor City have a reason to celebrate

The unique shopping mall is thriving, with 95 percent occupancy and nearly half of the retail outlets owned by women.

Built in 1972 as a one-of-a-kind enclosed, small retail center with natural light streaming in through skylights and windows, the Orchard Mall is developing its own sorority of sorts, where women business owners across the age spectrum support each other, brainstorm and encourage business for everyone.

"We feed off each other," says Lois Levenson, co-owner with her daughter, Julie Feldman-Unatin, of the trendy young fashion store Guys 'N Gals.

"We send customers to each other and we all work well together. We have sales together, advertise together, we cooperate.

"I don't feel competition at all. I want every one of my neighbors to be successful."

Of the 25 shops in the mall, 11 are owned by women. That's higher than the national average of 28.2 percent of all nonagricultural firms in the United States that are woman-owned.

While women make up an even half of the

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**From left: Julie Feldman-Unatin, Lois Levenson (co-owners of Guys N Gals), Nancy Zide (Nancy's Linens), Ally Cohen (Frameable Faces Photography) and Nadica Ristivojevic (Maria's Bridal Couture).**

population, women-owned companies only accounted for 6.5 percent of total employment, and 4.2 percent of total receipts in 2002.

The largest shares of women-owned business sales were in the retail sector.

The majority of women-owned businesses are in the service sector.

Studies from the Center for Women's Business Research show that women emphasize relationship-building with customers and colleagues more than men, as well as fact-

gathering and advice-seeking to improve the business. Many of the stores in the mall have sophisticated Web sites and Facebook presences.

"Our main goal is customer service," says Sue Loussia-Hickey, owner of Eleganza Boutique.

"We really take care of our customers." That's true for all the women-owned businesses in Orchard Mall. They also take care of each other.

## FYI

The Orchard Mall is at 6445 Orchard Lake Road, at the corner of Maple Road, in West Bloomfield. Call (248) 851-7727 for information.

When Nancy Zide was deciding to move her linen and monogram shop into the mall, she strolled store to store, asking the women proprietors how things were going.

"Nobody gave me a song and dance," she says.

"I feel like I'm part of a community. Everybody's been very welcoming. We all know that one depends on the other for business."

While there are a number of similar businesses in the mall, no two are exactly the same — which makes it easy not to compete.

"It's awesome to be surrounded by so many strong and talented women," says Ally Cohen, whose photography studio, Frameable Faces, opened across from Nancy's Linens in November of 2008.

Next to Nancy's is Maria's Bridal Couture, a woman-owned, high-end bridal salon that opened this year.

"It's a testament to how strong women are," says Cohen, "to open a business in an economy like this and thrive and grow — we work off each other so we can all achieve success."

The mall is planning a renovation of its center court area to create an inviting atmosphere with tables for gathering with friends, a cup of coffee and wi-fi Internet access.

The following mall businesses are owned by women: Alterations & More, The Beauty Lounge, Eleganza Boutique, Frameable Faces Photography, Gotta Dance, Guys 'N Gals, Maria's Bridal Couture, Nancy's Linens, Sally's Design, Shangri-La Chinese Restaurant and Slades.