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- Pam Sheldon

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By KAREN SMITH The Champion \*

Word of mouth advertising is the focus of a new business organization that's making its way across Canada from south of the border.

The Business Network International (BNI), a concept brought to the country by area resident Pam Sheldon, is a formalized

system of giving and receiving business.

"It's simple because it's based on the proven concept of 'what goes around comes around," said Ms Sheldon, a former Halton regional councillor. "If I help you and you help me, we will both benefit from the result."

The BNI, created by Dr. Ivan Misner of California, is a private enterprise that runs chapters of the network across North America. More than 35 chapters have already been established in Canada, Ms Sheldon said.

A recently-founded Milton chapter has 231

Turk, a Royal LePage real estate agent and president of the local group.

Ms Turk and Melissa DeBrouwer, a financial planner with Donaldson Bourgon Financial Services, approached Ms Sheldon with the idea of the bringing the BNI to Milton.

Members pay an annual fee of \$295 and, in return, the BNI promises substantially increased business.

Belonging to the Business Network is

like having dozens of sales people working for you because all the other members carry several copies of your business cards around with them," Ms Sheldon said.

"When they meet someone who could use your products or services they hand your card out and recommend your ser-

The organization allows only one person from each profession to join a chapter.

Among the Milton members are a massage therapist, chiropractor, printer, scuba diving instructor and mortgage expert.

The membership fee covers the cost of setting up the network, training directors and continued operations overseen by Ms Sheldon.

BNI also sends members tools to network more effectively, including an orientation cassette tape. A free spot in business trade shows and periodic workshops on networking are also included.

Member Stephen Boers of Bill's Auto Body said the structured atmosphere

members and is still growing, says Debra - of the network is important for the success of the chapter.

"It needs to be structured because if it wasn't you wouldn't accomplish a whole lot," said the nephew of Bill's Auto Body owner Ries Boers.

The Milton chapter holds breakfast meetings every Friday morning in town. Members, who are encouraged to use each other's services, are required to introduce themselves and talk about their businesses briefly at each meeting.



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