

# 'It's really time to put gender aside'

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Cathy Sweet was pumping gas recently, filling up a company truck bearing the Comztar Commercial Properties logo.

As it filled, a man pumping gas nearby asked her lightheartedly, "aren't you glad you don't have to pay for it?"

She smiled and laughed, deciding it was easier and quicker to let the comment go by than explain he was wrong.

The fact is, Sweet was paying for the gas, and the truck, and whatever it cost to brand it with the company logo.

Cathy Sweet is 100 per cent owner of Comztar, which has specialized in developing and leasing large industrial, warehousing and commercial properties for more than two decades.

Her portfolio of properties, all in the 5,000- to 40,000-square-foot range, include buildings in Moncton, Dieppe, Miramichi, Bathurst and the Halifax Regional Municipality.

Because she has a well-established business, because she is young, and just perhaps because she is female, the Riverview native admits she sometimes has to explain to prospective clients that she's the boss and there's not a man in the corner office somewhere who she has to clear things with.

That may be a bit of a challenge at times, but, "challenges are a part of being an entrepreneur," she says. "It's really time to put the gender aside."

She says she hasn't found being a woman to be a disadvantage in her Moncton-based business, whatever the perceptions of the industrial commercial real

estate business might be.

In some ways, it seems obvious Cathy Sweet might go into such a business, as she grew up being exposed to and working in property management in her family's businesses. She says the talk around the dinner table was always about business and entrepreneurship.

Despite that, she went the corporate route in her career aspirations, working for some of the biggest names in business.

She worked for organizations like Coca-Cola, Procter & Gamble and GlaxoSmithKline right up until last summer – all while building her own business.

"I was working days and nights and weekends," she says, "You do what you have to do."

She says people should expect to hear more from her and Comztar now that it's her full-time focus.

Of the company name, she says, "nobody knows how to pronounce it, but someday they will."

Business consultant and former provincial cabinet minister Aldéa Landry says women are under-represented in the business community, even though they represent both the majority of the general population and the majority of the entrepreneurs in the province.

Part of a panel discussion on growing southeastern New Brunswick's economy at the Greater Moncton Economic Summit 2014 in Moncton last month, Landry bluntly pointed out that she was the only one on the panel who could bring a woman's perspective to how the region could better leverage its opportunities.

Looking back on it now, she says she hadn't intended her



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**Cathy Sweet owns Comztar, a company that leases industrial and other commercial spaces in Moncton, Dieppe, Miramichi and Bathurst.**

words to be quite so plain. Nevertheless, she says many area businesswomen and their success stories remain beneath the radar.

"I don't want to be negative about the summit," she says.

"But as we speak about the future of greater Moncton, one of the assets we should not forget the fact there are a lot of businesswomen in the area who are contributing."

"We are 52 per cent of the population. And three of five small- and medium-sized businesses are created by women," she says.

At a time when we're looking to attract immigrants or bring New Brunswickers back home, she believes we are too often overlooking what more than half the New Brunswickers already here can contribute.

Much progress has been made over the years, but still, she has

found in her experience, "men don't automatically look to women as potential investors and potential business partners."

So the conversation isn't just about men in the business world failing to give female entrepreneurs a chance to succeed.

In some cases women in the business world aren't getting the chance to help male entrepreneurs succeed either.

"Business women have to become part of the mainstream. The business community has to realize we are not a cultural group, we're not a minority."

Another interesting perspective comes from Monique Imbeault, a Moncton lawyer and businesswoman who owns GFC Holdings.

Accomplished in her own right, Imbeault has nevertheless tended over the years to be referred to as "the wife of Bernard Imbeault," the highly successful business-

man who founded the Pizza Delight empire.

"I usually get in the door because I'm Bernard's wife," she says.

"But it's a disadvantage too," when it comes to being taken seriously.

In her years of doing business in this region, "I didn't find it more difficult to be a woman."

However, as she has started to work her way into bigger circles, she's found gender has become more of an issue.

"As soon as you start getting on corporate boards, it's a big boys' club," she says.

"There is really not a lot of women on boards."

Denise LeBlanc recalls a time when she would have been happy to even sit in her local Rotary Club, let alone on a corporate board.

LeBlanc, who has been in business for nearly three decades, recalls how as a 23-year-old entrepreneur, she tried to join the Rotary Club in Bouctouche, only to find it was in those days closed to women.

"It's changed so much," she says, mentioning Aldéa Landry and Monique Imbeault as two of the women helping to drive that.

LeBlanc owns Texmedico, a manufacturer of orthopedic products, and is a majority owner of Cleaners on the Move, a commercial and industrial cleaning firm.

These days, she laughs off some of the challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated world.

"Years ago, it used to make me so mad when a man wouldn't take me seriously.

"Now it doesn't matter, as long as there's a profit at the end of the day," she says with a laugh.