

Networking in a mansion

Membership in the exclusive Kelowna Signature Business Network costs \$4,800 a year

By STEVE MacNAULL
The Okanagan Saturday

Fact: You get more people out to a networking event when it's held in a \$5 million mansion.

"It's very intriguing to people to be invited to an ultra-luxury home," said Darlene Brule of Kelowna Signature Business Network.

"These are the kinds of exclusive homes that people usually never get inside, so they want to see them."

Such an event was held this week at Casa Loma Estate, a 6,500-square-foot, five-bedroom, seven-bathroom home with pool and guest cottage at 2603 Lucine Rd. in the Casa Loma neighbourhood on the Westside.

Brule has teamed with Christa Frosch of Sotheby's Realty in order to get spectacular venues for networking events.

"It's an excellent concept," said Frosch.

"People want to come to these networking events because of the incredible homes and it gives Sotheby's listings exposure to professionals in the community who may be interested in the home themselves or at least tell others who may be interested."

Brule is going the extra mile with these networking events because she wants them to be different than any other.

"We want to bring together business professionals in stunning locations to forge relationships with other business people," she said.

"This is not about people handing out their business cards and pumping sales. It's about relationships."

To maintain that exclusivity, membership in the Kelowna Signature Business Network costs \$4,800 a year.



GARY NYLANDER/The Okanagan Saturday

Darlene Brule, left, of Kelowna Signature Business Network and Christa Frosch, of Sotheby's Realty, have teamed up to offer exclusive networking events in multi-million dollar homes.

Membership includes six receptions and space in a twice-a-year, glossy portfolio profiling members.

For the networking events, members, of course, are invited and they are able to bring along five friends and associates.

Brule also has a database of 130 possible members she invites to experience the networking first hand.

About 150 attended this week's mixer at the mansion, which proves again that the high-end home angle works.

Brule has hosted events at luxury homes, golf courses and hotels, and the

attendance at the homes is always double.

The previous networking was held at Tuscan Villa above Mission Hill Winery, a 7,400-square-foot view home with private art collection that's listed for sale by Sotheby's for \$7.9 million.

Sotheby's likes to highlight its Okanagan Collection of 18 luxury homes listed for sale locally as well as internationally.

"The reality is these homes also need global exposure," said Frosch.

"We do that through our 500 offices worldwide, the OkanaganCollection.com website and by attending shows like the

Millionaire Fair in Moscow, underway until Nov. 19.

Brule also works as the Okanagan program manager for Junior Achievement, the organization that matches businesspeople with schools so youngsters are exposed to commerce, investing and community service.

"I was finding it hard to meet the right business people to volunteer for Junior Achievement, so I set up Kelowna Signature Business Network a year ago and have found out that the concept works now on so many levels," said Brule.



STEVE
MACNAULL
Valley Views

Penticton Airport sets record

Non-stop flights to Calgary and short-hop flights to Kelowna during the Highway 97 closure are expected to push Penticton Airport to record passenger counts this year.

Penticton Airport manager David Allen is forecasting that 95,000 passengers will use the facility in 2008, a 22 per cent jump over 2007's count.

"The addition of Pacific Coastal Airlines has definitely given travellers more departure and arrival times as well as the Calgary-direct option," said Allen.

"Air Canada Jazz has remained very busy and the total passenger numbers show tremendous growth at YYF."

Pacific Coastal entered the Penticton market in September 2007, offering two flights a day between Penticton and Vancouver and one a day between Penticton and Calgary.

That's the first non-stop-to-Calgary service Penticton has had in several years.

The Calgary non-stop helped South Okanagan travellers from having to drive to Kelowna Airport to catch flights.

"It means local jobs are retained and travellers are not driving beyond this point to access air travel," said Penticton economic development officer Wayne Tebbutt.

Air Canada flies between Penticton