



STRIDES at Lowenstein Sandler PC

By Cheryl Lomax

A Strong Forum for High-level Women in Business

STRIDES—Advancing Women in Business is an initiative of Lowenstein Sandler PC, a nationally recognized law firm with more than 275 attorneys with offices in New York, New Jersey and Boston. Mary Hildebrand and Christine Osvald-Mruz, members of the firm, are the Co-founders and Co-chairs of STRIDES.

STRIDES has a different mission from other women's groups, reaching out to include executive level women throughout the business community. "Given the complexity and challenges facing women in the workplace, our firm thought it would be most productive to subdivide external and internal women's initiatives so that we could focus appropriately," says Osvald-Mruz. STRIDES has an outward focus, with a mission of promoting visibility, leadership opportunities and quality peer interaction for women in business. "By focusing outward, STRIDES has proven to be a strong forum for strategies on effective career advancement for high-level women in business, as well as leading-edge policies for businesses committed to retaining and promoting talented women," she adds.

STRIDES held its inaugural event in July 2006, though the planning dated back to the beginning of that year. "STRIDES brings together mid- to senior-level executive and professional women to focus on key career issues," says Hildebrand. "A number of our firm's members and counsel regularly attend STRIDES events and provide positive feedback," she adds. Events include casual roundtable discussions, panel presentations and formal speakers. Timely books, articles or studies relat-

ing to women's advancement in the workplace frequently inspire the topics for STRIDES events. For example, in November 2007, STRIDES held a roundtable discussion entitled, "Wedded to Work, and in Dire Need of a Wife" which focused on an August, 2007 *New York Times* article by Shira Boss. "The topic provoked a wide-ranging discussion on women's careers, division of household labor and ways of striking a balance that works," says Hildebrand.

"STRIDES complements our firm's internal Women's Initiative, which is part of our firm's Diversity Initiatives Committee," says Nicole Bearce Albano, member of the firm and Chair of the Diversity Initiatives Committee. "Firm management is highly supportive of the initiative, and our firm's marketing department assists with the logistics," Albano adds. In fact, Lowenstein Sandler's support of STRIDES helped lead to the firm's invitation to be part of the Hidden Brain Drain Task Force Center for Work-Life Policy's through which academic and business leaders come together to study the challenges companies have in retaining talented women and minorities and formulate policy and practice solutions to change the equation.

"Given STRIDES' external focus, we hope that the impact of STRIDES will be broader than just within our firm," says Hildebrand. "We hope to afford all participants quality peer networking, education and awareness-building with respect to issues that impact women in business and inspiration to action so that positive change can result," adds Osvald-Mruz. ♦



Key members of STRIDES are Nicole Bearce Albano (left), Chair of the firm's Diversity Initiatives Committee, Mary Hildebrand (center) who, along with Christine Osvald-Mruz (right), is Co-chair and Co-founder of STRIDES