

# WHO'S NEWS



Marc Behr

## Marion Behr: Women Working At Home Is Her Business

**"I learned that women were running home-based businesses in attics, basements, bedrooms, studios, home offices, and even renovated closets. They loved their independence and the opportunity to set their own working hours and conditions."**

By Vivian Doering

Did you know that Mary Kay Cosmetics, Apple Computers, and Hershey candy all started from home-based businesses? With this information, **Marion Behr**, forty-five, of Edison, New Jersey, testified in front of the U.S. Labor Department last year, confronting the agency on its restrictions on working at home.

"If someone told me seven years ago that I would be talking to men in the Labor Department, I would have told them they were crazy," said Marion. "I was very shy when all this started, but I believe you can turn a dream into a national reality. The thing is, you either believe in free enterprise or you don't."

When Marion Behr accepted a speaking engagement at Princeton, New Jersey, in 1978, she never expected to become the founding president of a national organization that would help women working at home.

"At the time I was a busy wife, mother, and freelance artist, selling my illustrations to major magazines and exhibiting my work in major art shows," she recalled. The keen audience response inspired her to find out more about women working at home and their needs.

She surveyed hundreds of women nationwide and discovered that they were making anything from pin money to six-figure incomes in more than 200 home-based careers. Not only did Marion find

herself with a wealth of information about enterprising women, she also zeroed in on their major problem: isolation. To help them combat this, she founded the National Alliance of Home-based Businesswomen, a nonprofit organization that now has 1,200 members and holds an annual meeting and chapter meetings throughout the nation.

The Alliance sends out two newsletters four times a year. One, *The Alliance*, is similar to a corporate newsletter; the other, *Meeting by Mail*, is designed for those who can't attend chapter meetings.

As the Alliance grew, Marion found herself acting more and more as spokeswoman for the organization. In the last 18 months she has traveled thousands of miles, speaking at business conferences, often for substantial fees, and at state and national legislative hearings, about the pluses of women working at home.

"The more involved I became, the more aware I was of the outdated federal regulations prohibiting women from doing home work in seven restricted areas: knitted outerwear, women's apparel, embroidery, jewelry, buckles and buttons, handkerchiefs, and gloves and mittens. I decided to do something about those restrictions, especially since 13 percent of the nation's work force works from home, 7 percent full time, and the other 6 percent on second home-based jobs."

With longtime friend Wendy Lazar, she went about solving another problem

of home-based workers—getting information. Together they formed a profitable business, Women Working Home, Inc., which disseminates information on home businesses through seminars and workshops. They also wrote *Women Working Home: The Homebased Business Guide and Directory*, which was published by their company.

"Wendy and I wrote about the subjects we knew well: organization, goal-setting, business plans, public relations, and how to combine raising children with home work." In addition, they sought advice from experts on patents, insurance, accounting, taxes, marketing, and the law. Now in its second printing, the book has sold 45,000 copies and is used as a prime source by the American Association of Junior and Community Colleges for courses being given throughout the United States.

Although Marion likes working at home, she agrees that some women are better off working away from home. But she believes more women (and men) will opt to work from their homes in the future. "I think the computer has changed people's attitudes, in part. Women and men are using computers to sell commodities, handle importing and exporting, and for running a variety of businesses from their homes. They are earning a great deal of money, which is impressive."

Does Marion still find time for her art? "When I can, in between business trips and family commitments!" □

### If you want a home-based career, here's some

#### NEWS YOU CAN USE

- find out what your skills are and what the needs are in your area
- separate business time and space from family time and space
- check local zoning laws and other regulations that affect home-based businesses
- have a professional attitude, i.e., use business cards, an answering service or machine
- contact an attorney, accountant, and insurance broker

For additional information, contact: Small Business Administration (SBA), 1441 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20416; and National Alliance of Home-based Businesswomen (NAHB), P.O. Box 95, Norwood, NJ 07648.

Source: *Women Working Home: The Homebased Business Guide and Directory*, WWH Press, P.O. Box 237BK, Norwood, NJ 07648.