

Pics show Michelle-Mills Porter and Davinder Kaur with their awards at the Go- Woman! Conference.

Tsunami survivor provides inspiration for businesswomen

A Birmingham woman who set up her own jewellery business after her life-changing experiences as a victim of the Asian tsunami has been honoured at the Go-Woman! Women in Business Conference.

Michelle Mills-Porter from Bromsgrove set up Cherish Jewels after returning from Sri Lanka with her husband, Stewart, where the couple had been caught up in the horrors of the disaster in December 2004.

They had been holidaying in Hikkaduwa, celebrating a successful year for Michelle's company, Fizz Bang Marketing, when the tsunami struck.

"We spent a week without a roof over our heads, wondering if we had enough water to survive, surrounded by people who had lost everything - it made me re-evaluate everything that was important to me," said Michelle.

Returning home, she began making jewellery as a therapeutic hobby whilst she recovered from her injuries, which quickly developed into her own business. She uses gems in their natural form, and does her best to support small businesses in third world countries, and also produces charity bracelets for a number of causes.

Michelle won the award for Best New Business, after judges were impressed not just by the success of her business, born out of so much adversity, but her determination to help others too.

"Not only did Michelle meet our criteria most closely in this category but we felt she had particularly dedicated her time and expertise to helping to create opportunities for other women to advance, particularly in an area of the world where there are few," said Clare Hill of Go Woman Ltd, which organised the conference.

Davinder Kaur, of Sandwell Women's Enterprise Development Agency, was another winner at the event, taking the honour of Best Female Social Entrepreneur.

SWEDA is a unique agency which has been successfully providing services to the community for the past 15 years, and it was felt Davinda set an excellent example to those she was helping.

"Davinder has shown courage, leadership and selflessness against challenging circumstances and was considered in particular to have been an exemplary role model inspiring those around her to fulfil their business ambitions" said Yasmin Akhtar, also of Go Woman Ltd.

"The whole conference was a great success - a wonderful chance for some truly inspirational women to get together and share experiences and network.

"Michelle and Davinder are both exceptional women, and we believe their words and their actions will be a great catalyst for many more special women in our region to go and make a difference."

The conference took place at the Pavilion in Perry Barr, and was a chance to celebrate the many successes of female entrepreneurs, as well as offer advice and support to budding businesswomen, and help them achieve even more.

Businesswomen attending the event praised the opportunities it brought to advance their prospects.

Michelle added: "The venue was fabulous, and we had so much room to ourselves, Whether you wanted to sit and have an informal chat on a sofa, or get your diaries out at a table, there was everything you could have wanted.

"I have at least four serious business relationships moving forward from people I met on the day. One of those relationships is being signed off today, so it's real business, not just networking!

"I found the organisation of the whole event smooth, the catering fabulous, and the atmosphere quite unique. Quite frankly this event packed a punch!"

The event was also backed by Business Link West Midlands, the Women's Enterprise Centre of Expertise, the Women's Business Development Agency and Fair Finance Consortium.

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For more information, contact Clare or Yasmin from Go-Woman! on 0121 270 6133.

Issued by Linda Jones, Passionate Media, on 01543 468621.