



# Join the Club

BY GRACE WEBB

**W**hen Heidi Nelson started her Clubhouse last May as a way to offer “organic connections” to area women, she never dreamed she’d end up touching so many lives—but she did and continues to do so.

More than 80 women have already attended events at “Heidi’s Clubhouse,” located on the second floor of the Fleckenstein Building in downtown Faribault. These events have ranged from the monthly Clubhouse meetings - where women have a chance to get to know other women throughout the community - to various workshops. Everything is built around Nelson’s idea of “organic connections,” which, she explained, is all about helping people know, like and trust others so they can feel comfortable supporting each other.

“We have to know, like and trust someone before we’re willing to invest in them,” Nelson said. “Heidi’s Clubhouse is an organization

where women connect with other women and support each other in identifying and achieving their purpose.”

To really understand how her unique concept of “organic connections” came to be, you have to travel a little further back in time. Nelson first learned the importance of these sorts of connections when she started her Faribault lodging business, Be My Guest Loft, in 2014. Looking for guidance from other business women she admired, she invited them to meet monthly to discuss business challenges and offer wisdom to each other. The group eventually disbanded because of the members’ busy work lives, but their bond remained and they became a group of dear and loyal friends, Nelson said. The experience stuck with her as she moved forward in her business.

In May 2016, as Nelson worked with a life coach in Minneapolis, she was asked to name things she had been involved with and was proud of. It was a long list, but one thing that really jumped out was the group of women she’d put together all those years ago.

“It was like a light bulb went on,” she said. “I’d found my purpose.”

Nelson decided to form another group for women who wanted to connect across their community and support each other in any environment - whether they were business owners, career professionals,



## THE NEW SCHEDULE

Beginning in January, Heidi's Clubhouse will meet twice a month, 5:30-7:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. These gatherings will take place at the Fleckenstein Building at 220 Central Avenue N. in downtown Faribault, and will include beverages, snacks, education and meaningful connections.

Women will grow personally and professionally and, during these meetings, Nelson will teach them about casual yet productive communication, which can improve both business lives and personal lives.

There will also be some field trips coming up, where members can meet at local businesses to get an inside look at things other women are doing in their communities. Businesses that would like to host a field trip can contact Nelson.

## ORGANIC CONNECTIONS

According to Nelson, organic connections are all about learning about one another and forming relationships, even in simple, causal settings.

"You can do that over a glass of wine or a cup of tea, or (when you are) creating a new blanket," Nelson said. "Some of the Heidi's Clubhouse events are really going to show you how to effectively communicate with other people, casually, so it doesn't seem like you're at a job interview. This isn't stressful. It's welcoming. People are going to realize that they don't want to miss it."

Nelson said this sort of networking is especially important for women who want to support each other in different areas in their communities.

"The best way to support each other is by making connections... so I know you as a person and (can) promote your business," she explained. "That's the way women do things: they make emotional decisions about the way they spend their money. Because we buy things that way, that's the way we're going to connect with people, and that's the way we're going to network."

mothers, volunteers or interested in anything that fueled their passions. She set the first date for May 31, only weeks away.

"I just figured, 'Why wait?'" Nelson said. "I jump into things. I just went through my contact list and invited everyone I thought might be interested, or (even those) who might not be. I just invited everyone."

About 20 women showed up for the first meeting. While Nelson expected most women had come because they were interested in growing their busi-

ness and making professional connections, she was a little surprised when one woman stood up and said she actually wasn't that interested in growing her business anymore. Now she was looking to form the kind of female friendships that she had missed along the way while developing her career.

Then another woman said the same thing. And another. And another.

"The whole thing ended, and I sat here by myself, and thought, 'Where do I go from here?'" Nelson said. "This was not the path I thought I was going down. Typically, when you launch something like this, it evolves over time. And that's what has happened with Heidi's Clubhouse."

The Clubhouse did indeed evolve, with more and more opportunities offered for women to come together and support each other. Once a month, women have had the chance to meet in an informal, casual gathering that included wine, snacks, and good conversations. There were also workshops featuring area professionals who offered talks on a diverse range of topics, such as legal issues relating to aging parents, relaxation methods including nutrition, essential oils and meditation, and skin care procedures.

Nelson stresses that every woman is welcome at Heidi's Clubhouse. "Heidi's Clubhouse really is for any woman, not only for 'business' women or owners," she said. "It doesn't matter if your purpose is to grow your business, or become a more effective wife and mother, or start a mission trip to Africa. I want to be able to create an environment that sup-

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CONTINUES ON PAGE 12 ►►►



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CONTINUES FROM PAGE 11

ports all of that.”

About 20 women attend each event at Heidi’s Clubhouse, with people coming from Faribault, Northfield, Owatonna, Kenyon and beyond.

Looking at the future, Nelson said she plans to offer even more events on an even wider range of topics. She will also start charging annual dues to create an official “membership.” Members will be listed on her website’s directory and have free access to any events. Membership is not mandatory and for people who aren’t sure if they want to join, Nelson said they can try two events at no charge before deciding, or they can pay a small fee at the door. Membership will be beneficial to many. Part of the membership fee will be used to make a difference in the lives of women locally and globally who could use a

little extra support. Heidi’s Clubhouse will help sponsor Ruth’s House of Hope in Faribault, as well as Market Colors, a global organization that helps women in India and Africa create a better life for themselves by offering jobs in skilled professions.

Nelson encourages every woman to come check out the clubhouse for themselves.

“The core of Heidi’s Clubhouse is how to serve women,” Nelson said. “It’s a group where women are prioritizing women, to make sure everyone feels they’re welcome to come here and everyone has the opportunity to grow and be connected. Hopefully, through Heidi’s Clubhouse, we get more and more people to realize it’s all about helping people. We want people to come here and feel encouraged and engaged and educated.”

*Grace Webb is a wandering reporter whose home base is Mankato.*



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