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<http://www.bristol247.com/2009/11/18/top-women-entrepreneurs-celebrated-at-awards-ceremony/>

Top women entrepreneurs celebrated at awards ceremony



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The woman whose vision and determination to provide a whole new concept for the male-dominated property market in the UK has been named female entrepreneur of the year at an awards ceremony in Bristol today.

Lesley Freed from Saco – which offers serviced apartments to workers living away from home on long-term projects – received the award at a ceremony at the Mercure Holland House Hotel, hosted by TV presenter Sherrie Eugene.

Sponsored by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), the award recognised her “staggering innovation spotting a gap in the market and has demonstrated incredible success in the male dominated world of property”.

Saco, based on Whiteladies Road, was born in 1997 and in 12 years has become a business with a £14million turnover, employing more than 100 staff.

The concept was created following business trips to the US during the 1990s, where the serviced apartments sector had been well established for years. Ms Freed saw a gap in the UK market, as working patterns changed and staff were sent across the country on long-term projects.

Noticing a related need for leisure travellers and people relocating for more private accommodation than simply hotels, SACO was born and operates and manages its own apartments in 21 locations across the UK and provides serviced accommodation through their worldwide network in 35 countries worldwide.

The company has remained consistently profitable and has seen a sales growth of 90% in the last two years despite the economic downturn.

This year it achieved Beacon Status, highlighting SACO as one of the South West’s top performing businesses in recognition of the company’s significant business achievements. It also won the title of ‘Best Property Provider or Solution’ at the Re:locate Awards for two years running in 2008 and 2009. This year, the company also came 67th in the Sunday Times Top 100 Best Small Companies to Work For 2009.

Meanwhile, Angela Ladd of Radstock-based German Translations, received the Enterprise Champions Award, provided by BusinessLink, for her dedication to support and champion enterprise in the region.

Kirsten Hemingway, of the IoD and head of the [Hemingway Corporation](#), said Ms Ladd deserved the award “in the name of all volunteers, who on an unrecognised and unpaid basis, promote the interests of all micro, small- and medium-sized businesses”.

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Other winners at the event – one of three events across the South West to mark Women’s Enterprise Day – included Rachel Titman of Nameless Media, based in Broad Street. Ms Titman’s work to build up the digital creatives firm won her the Rising Star Award, sponsored by Science City Bristol.

Tracey Williams was praised for her “incredibly enterprising and very brave” decision to start up Exigo – a corporate finance firm – in the teeth of the recession last year. After a busy and positive first year providing small- and medium- size companies high-quality, partner-led service in the corporate finance sector, Ms Williams received the Recession Recovery Award.

Julie Harris, of Devon-based web design, ICT consultancy and training outfit [Cosmic](#) won the Women in the Public Sector award for her work targeting young people, older people who have ‘missed out’, and people in remote areas with access to information technology.

Meanwhile, in recognition of the way men can support and encourage women into business, Rob McCabe of the Secretaries Network – based in Portishead – received the Enterprising Man award for being “very hard to ignore as a great and inspirational figure in women’s enterprise”.

The celebration of Women’s Enterprise in the South West – sponsored by [Women of the West](#) and the [South West RDA](#), and supported by the [Institute of Directors](#) – aims to promote the role of women in business.

The UK still lags behind its major competitors in terms of the number of women starting and running businesses – despite the successes of the last few years.

According to government figures, there are 620,000 majority women-owned businesses in the UK generating about £130bn turnover.

However, if the UK had the same level of women-owned businesses as the US, Britain would gain three quarters of a million more businesses.

Fear of failure has been identified by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor as the key reason why a third of women in the country have not started their own business.

Further reading

- SACO: <http://www.sacoapartments.co.uk>
- German Translations: <http://www.angela-ladd-german-translations.co.uk/>
- Nameless Media: <http://www.nameless.co.uk/>
- Exigo: <http://www.exigo-cf.co.uk/>
- Secretaries Network: <http://www.secretarynetwork.co.uk>