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Annual Women's Day Breakfast celebrates lives of spirit, integrity *[Final Edition]*

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The entrepreneurial spirit oozes from Elen Steinberg.

The 38-year-old Toronto mother of two says her drive comes from her immigrant mother and grandmother.

"At the age of 14, 15, I was signing legal documents and buying houses on behalf of my family. You grow up fast . . . You become an entrepreneur," Steinberg told a breakfast crowd at Kitchener City Hall yesterday.

Steinberg was one of two speakers featured at the eighth annual International Women's Day Breakfast, hosted by Kitchener Centre MP Karen Redman and by the women's committee of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce.

Redman praised the women in the crowd and said that women are the backbone of Canadian families.

"They do the household tasks, work in and out of the home. They are teachers, doctors, politicians and entrepreneurs."

The other speaker was Carolyn Stark, a 29-year-old occupational therapist who grew up in Waterloo.

Stark currently works at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto and hopes to go to medical school in northern Ontario.

Steinberg was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, and lived in Austria and Italy before emigrating to Montreal. By the age of 20, she spoke four languages.

She studied to be a journalist, but then moved towards promotions and worked with advertising agencies.

She started her own promotional agency and from 1987 to 1995 had clients such as General Motors, Kodak and Esso.

Business boomed when she began a credit card sales program at Canadian airports. In 14 months, she went from \$300,000 in sales to \$3 million.

"We lived every day like it was going to end tomorrow," she said. "We were holding on to the tail of the dragon. You couldn't let go because it was the end."

But to get a taste of reality, you need to crash, Steinburg told the group.

When airports began to be privatized, one by one, Steinburg's business was shut down.

But Steinburg's tenacity carried her through the period of uncertainty. She rebuilt her business and now runs SPP Marketing Services Inc., which has mobile credit card kiosks at Canadian airports.

Steinburg said women must overcome their fears and pursue their dreams.

"Don't be afraid. You gotta go for it," she said. "All they can say is no."

For Stark, a similar belief in pursuing her passion encourages her to make a meaningful contribution.

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As a teenager, Stark participated in a youth program where she travelled to the coast of Indonesia. For four months she lived in a remote village and worked on international development projects.

She went on to earn a master's degree in occupational therapy and then set off to India where she worked as an HIV/AIDS worker in New Delhi. She continued working as an HIV worker in Toronto, helping the homeless, drug users and sex-trade workers.

Despite the poverty she has seen, she knows her work is making a difference.

"Act locally and think globally," Stark told the group. "You have to accept you can't change the world."

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