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When Local Vine founders Sarah Munson (left) and Allison Nelson moved to Seattle a few years ago, NWEN helped introduce them to other women entrepreneurs.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER CUMMING

Pour Your Heart Into It

Two high-powered business veterans use the Northwest Entrepreneur Network to help fund their wine-bar dream.

When East Coast entrepreneurs Allison Nelson and Sarah Munson arrived in Seattle two and a half years ago, they shared a vision of opening a wine bar with more emphasis on the "wine" part than the "bar" part.

"We were looking for kind of a Starbucks-after-dark environment," says Nelson. "A place to meet with friends, maybe do a little work and relax in an atmosphere that wasn't a bar and didn't have the regimen of a formal restaurant."

The problem, however, was getting to know the right people in Seattle. True, both women were tested veterans of the corporate world. Nelson had been a management consultant at Bain & Co., an investment banker for Kidder, Peabody & Co. and an equity analyst at Credit Suisse First Boston. She also co-founded Bookmarks Publishing, which publishes the monthly magazine, *Bookmarks*. Munson also had management experience, specializing in merchandising at Beauty.com, Drugstore.

com and Estee Lauder. She also worked at Bain & Co., where she first met Nelson; the pair attended Harvard Business School together, both graduating with MBAs.

But this background wasn't much help learning the "who's who" in Seattle's entrepreneurial world.

In 2006, while pitching their business idea at the Puget Sound Venture Forum, they met then-NWEN executive director Cynthia Chirot.

"We were interested in speaking with her because, outside of the goal of meeting investors, we wanted to meet other women entrepreneurs," explains Nelson. "Sarah and I were a little bit of a minority in that area."

In spring 2007, in the middle of raising \$1 million to open their business, the pair pitched their idea to angel investors and venture capitalists at NWEN's annual Early Stage Investment Forum. In July 2007, their dream was realized: They opened The Local Vine, at the corner of Vine Street and Second Avenue, in Seattle's Belltown neighborhood.

"The experience was really positive," says Nelson. "It's pretty easy to tap into an organization like NWEN. We were able to meet a wonderful group of investors, service providers and other entrepreneurs. It really helped us with our networking." —T.M.