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Women find joy in connecting

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Annette Walden Mason & Phyllys Ransom celebrated three years of joy Tuesday. They marked her third year as leader of **The Joy of Connecting** during the local group's monthly meeting at Fire Water Chop-house.

The women's networking organization began in Atlanta about seven years ago, but has since expanded across the state and nation. Every month, the organization brings together women from across the county to meet, eat and talk business. Tuesday's gathering drew a crowd of about 30.

"There's no membership in this," Mason said. "You can go to any meeting at any time. We have formal and informal networking, we have dinner. "It's a relaxed atmosphere, especially for these women who are just starting a business."

Mason attended one meeting with the Johns Creek group and decided to work with Phyllys Ransom to start the Cumming chapter. Since that time, Mason has made several friends and even more connections for her business, Painted Lady Enterprises. But it's not just Mason's gifts, greeting card and promotional business that benefits. The meetings draw representatives with a wide range of industries, from reflexology and jewelry to automobile repair and banking industries.

Jacqueline Graves has been attending the meetings all three years. "I like the fact that it's just women," she said. "It's a nice variety of right-brained and left-brained women you never know who you're going to run into there. It's not always the same group."

There is no membership for the organization, just a \$25 fee to attend the meeting, which includes dinner and a printed roster to keep communication open. During meetings, everyone who attends gives a three-minute presentation on her business. The evening usually begins with a meet-and-greet session. Graves, who makes her own jewelry and sells antiques, said the nights typically end with chit chat.

"I'm kind of tired of the word network, because really, people have been networking for thousands of years," she said. "We call it friendship. We call it chit chat. "When your next door neighbor comes over for a cup of coffee and she mentions her mechanic did a really good job on her car, nowadays that's called networking."

Many entrepreneurs and small business owners have limited free time, so The Joy of Networking meetings give a condensed way to meet other professionals over a meal.

"We like to do business with each other," Mason said. "We like to support each other. "When we need a product or service, I try to look at **The Joy of Connecting** first to support another business owner. It's good for business."