

## **Rocky Mountain High**

### **By Stephanie MacKendrick**

At first, I thought that it might have been the thin air. After all, Banff is some 4500 feet above sea level and for us lowlanders, that kind of altitude can make us a bit giddy. But then I recalled that my previous visits to the rapturously beautiful locale, while wonderful, had never resulted in euphoria (no, not even in college and no, I didn't inhale).

I put my sharpest analytical skills to the test and examined the situation: Early March. A fresh dusting of snow clinging to the trees and blanketing the ground. Twenty women from across Canada from all sectors of the communications industry gathered at the Banff Centre. Faculty from the leading edge of the new media world, sharing their expertise and enthusiasm.

I was starting to see a pattern.

The pattern, of course, was Career Accelerator, in this case, the inaugural Corus/CWC New Media Career Accelerator, a program that had been designed to bring together the best and brightest from Canada's communications industry to spend a week immersed in a combination of theoretical and hands-on experience in new media. It would ensure that the participants left with a thorough understanding of the realities and possibilities of new media and, further that the intensive format provided the chance to bond and form a peer group of kindred spirits to support one another as they emerge as industry leaders.

We had great hopes for the course. As new media develops, we wanted to make sure women were there, and comfortable, on the leading edge. That's not always the case. Most technology-based industries tend to have fewer women and although new media is far from being just about new presentation and delivery technologies, it started out that way. But of course, the tech focus has given way to content and the integration of new media into the other converged streams of the communications industry. Clearly, we felt that women need to be well represented in the new media leadership as creating content across multiple media platforms becomes the norm and new media strategies become and integral part of our business.

Enter the CWC new media Career Accelerator. With funding from Corus Entertainment, we worked with David Kincaid and his team at Corus and Sara Diamond, Executive Producer for Television and New Media and the Artistic Director of Media and Visual Arts, the Banff Centre, to create a program that we hoped would educate, inspire and motivate a select group of women. We hoped that by bringing together a talented group from diverse communications backgrounds that we could focus on new media to help women also gain a leadership position in understanding and applying convergence in their jobs.

With her customary knowledge, connectedness and enthusiasm, Sara - and her team - did a truly magnificent job in developing a curriculum that provided the holy trinity of new media. First, a creative focus to get everyone out of the box; second, a practical business focus to bring them down to earth and make it applicable to the real world and third, a technological outlook that ensured that all the participants were aware of what's ahead in platforms, technologies and capabilities.

And then there was Banff, beautiful beyond description, minus 37 after the ice storm abated, a tiny yet sophisticated town and a campus overlooking the Bow River and the magnificent Banff Springs Hotel - built-in inspiration for all.

So all that's left in this saga is to take note of the names of few people you should watch for in the coming months and years, the first graduating class of the Corus/CWC New Media Career Accelerator: Mary Barroll, Marney Berube, Sarah Clarke, Corrie Coe, Jennifer Dobson, Wendy Ell, Lillyann Goldstein, Annie Hadida, Dana Johl, Linda Lefler, Shauna McCaffrey, Sue McGarvie, Carol McLean, Vivianne Morin, Yvonne Paulson, Lally Rementilla, Rekha Shah, Lillian Siu, Andrea Szego and Lila Wong.

And of course, none of this would have happened without Lori Ward of the Banff Centre whose organizational capabilities led us to believe that she had mastered the Vulcan mind meld in her ability to anticipate the wants and needs of the group.

I can't wait for the return engagement, in 2004.