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NEWiRE president message: This year's CREW Convention

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As the end of the year approaches, memories are still strong of this year's CREW Convention, in Miami.

There were more than 1,200 attendees, with a strong contingent from Boston, as usual. The convention was led by NEWiRE's Judy Nitsch, who is this year's CREW president. The convention theme was "The Rewards of Risk- Bold Choices, Big Returns." It had an impressive lineup of speakers - Katty Kay of the BBC, the economist Ken Rose, Steve Forbes, and keynote speaker Hillary Clinton.

Many of the speakers talked about the risks they have taken and their successes and mistakes, and the common point was made that networking is more than just building your own network - it's about building relationships.

Lisette Calderon, who is a first generation Cuban American whose parents worked at the local grocery store, spoke at the opening breakfast and had a mantra for psyching herself up for risks she took or as she went in to tough situations: "Head high. Put your smile on. Nerves of Steel. Puke later."

Kay, the BBC anchor who recently co-wrote "The Confidence Code," about the confidence gap between men and women, recommended eliminating "NATS," or "negative automatic thoughts," and she counseled that perfectionism is a confidence-killer. She suggested avoiding doubts by thinking of three positive scenarios instead of possible criticism.

Clinton continued the theme, telling CREW attendees to take criticism seriously - but not personally. Dare to compete, she said, and be willing to fail.

Andra Foster, director of acquisitions and business development for Net Lease Capital Advisors, in Nashua, N.H., attended the convention in Miami for the first time. On a NEWiRE scholarship, she said, "I wanted to experience the convention for networking and to meet my CREW mentor in Miami. She graciously entertained some of the Boston ladies and gave a few of us a personal 'insiders' tour of Miami."

Foster said she went expecting a platform on which to network nationally. "I went to all the sessions," she said. "I specifically liked the one on the Panama Canal. That was my favorite because my great, great uncle was the man who discovered the cure for Yellow Fever in the Panama Canal."

She said everyone she met was friendly. "It was easy to meet people and network with them. You're kind of all in the same boat in a new environment. I made quite a few new friends." She said she gained some new contacts in San Francisco and will visit them when she travels there.

Tabetha McCartney, director of development finance and sustainability for

Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly, in Brighton, also attended the convention on a NEWiRE scholarship, which pays many of an attendee's expenses. "I went because I think NEWiRE and

CREW should try to expand the reach of the organization to people involved with affordable housing," she said. "Twenty percent of NEWiRE's membership works in affordable housing. We have our own special housing and development group. It would be worthwhile for some of the other chapters to expand their reach."

McCartney went to every session available, including the one with Hillary Clinton. "I sat in the front row for the speech," she said. "Our accounting firm is one of the sponsors, a big firm that does a lot of housing work."

She said the best session was the one with BBC anchor Katty Kay, "talking about women and confidence and risk taking. I thought it was excellent, and I even bought the book."

Next year's convention is in Seattle. Foster said, "Washington state, here we come!"

Claudia Piper, senior vice president at Webster Bank, is the 2014-2015 president of New England Women in Real Estate (NEWiRE), Boston.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540