

## **Eliza Leadbeater, Belknap County Economic Development Council**

**One of six winners of New Hampshire Business Review's 2007 Outstanding Women in Business Awards**

**By Cindy Kibbe, New Hampshire Business Review**

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**Photo by John Hession**

To say that Eliza Leadbeater embodies the heart and soul of the Lakes Region might sound like a grandiose statement, but when one gets to know and understand just what she has done for the 11 communities in the area, the description becomes much more apt.

Through the innovative partnerships she has created, inspired and spearheaded as executive director of the Belknap County Economic Development Council – creating programs focusing on relocation assistance, a revolving loan fund, a business information center, even providing the very offices in which the BCEDC is located, for instance – she became one of the key reasons that the region's economy has bounced back from the recession of the early '90s.

Working both on behalf of the BCEDC and as a volunteer, she has devoted her time to such projects as the renovation of a homeless shelter, housing for single-parent families and the conversion of a mill complex into affordable housing and mixed-used commercial enterprises.

While much of what Leadbeater does involves building businesses and jobs, she also is a well-known expert in a completely different field. She is the author of four books on handspinning, including *Handspinning* and *Spinning and Spinning Wheels*, both still available at Amazon.com.

But it's probably fair to say that her contributions to handspinning pale in comparison to her work in the Lakes Region, where she also devotes her time to projects that add the vitality and quality of life in the area. From the renovation of a homeless shelter to the conversion of a mill complex into affordable housing and mixed-used commercial enterprises and – her most recent project – development of the Granite Media Center in Tilton, a soundstage and offices for those working in the film and creative industries, the hand of Eliza Leadbeater can be seen throughout Belknap County and the state as a whole.

**Q. What made you decide to go into this type of work?**

**A.** I never set out to build a career. I was earning a living and supporting my family, which had value unto itself.

I wanted to work with youth. I spent 15 years in England, going to school there, owning several businesses, and teaching in the slums of Liverpool. I came back to the U.S. in the 1980s, and a lot had changed. I started another business, but wasn't happy. I eventually took a job in economic development in Vermont. But it was almost by accident that I took the position in New Hampshire I have now.

A friend living in Vermont asked me to pick up a copy of the Union Leader. I happened to

scan the help wanted section myself and found the Belknap position. I applied and ended up interviewing with seven people, and was then offered the position.

**Q.** *What did you find to be the biggest challenge as a woman on the road to achieving your success?*

**A.** Borrowing money, for a business or a home. When I went to borrow for a house, the criteria seemed stiffer, even more so when I became single parent. I was here at Belknap for less than a year, and I wanted to start a women's bank. I spoke to many women, but they almost had fear of rocking the establishment, so it never got off the ground.

**Q.** *Have you found a difference in how women are accepted as successful in their chosen careers as compared to their male counterparts?*

**A.** It's not something I dwell on. There's always been a difference. Pay is different. Women are evaluated differently. There's a difference in the way women are criticized. There's a difference in the way women are accepted.

**Q.** *What was your biggest mistake and what did you learn from it?*

**A.** My first business was in my own name — I'll never do that again. It becomes part of your identity. When it became time to sell, they wanted me to stay on with the business. If I was trying to move on, why would I want to stay?

**Q.** *Who has been most instrumental in your success and why?*

**A.** My daughter Sarah keeps me going. But I have to say, in my case, it's environments more than a specific person. You have to be the most instrumental person to yourself.

**Q.** *What advice would you give to young women just starting their careers?*

**A.** Believe in yourself. Be creative, be passionate, but most of all, be compassionate.

— **Cindy Kibbe**