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High hopes for women-of-color conference

By **Stephanie Tavares** / STAFF WRITER

Planning teams are kicking their efforts into high gear this month in preparation for the state's first women-of-color conference.

The Las Vegas ethnic chambers of commerce are teaming up with local businesses to host the pilot program event in the hopes that it will inspire more women to do more for themselves, their businesses and their community.

"If we can strengthen the woman's voice then I think it will benefit the community as a whole," said Asian Chamber President Sandi Saito, an event coordinator. "Women will now be taking those steps up, going for the higher positions. They'll be more active in their communities with different types of organizations and they're going to vote and learn how the system works — how to change things. We're going to really start getting everything from the young professionals and students to women like me in our 40s. We'll all be kicked into a higher gear than we've been running in before."

The event was originally conceived as a fo-

rum by Debra Nelson, vice president of corporate diversity and community affairs for MGM Mirage. Nelson knew of similar events in other states and felt there was a great need for it in Nevada. After talking to the ethnic chambers and bringing in other sponsors, the forum grew into something much larger.

While many of the details have yet to be solidified, organizers know the conference will start with a keynote breakfast and then the group will break into workshops ranging from wealth strategies, career development, nontraditional careers, women's health and wellness, education and one session about being the best you can be called "bringing sexy back." Throughout the day women will be encouraged to mix and mingle, make new friends and build a network of women professionals.

"I think the highlight is for women to be able to, in the breakout sessions, build relationships with women in the same boat as they are who they don't know yet," Saito said. "As women we all face the same challenges, especially in the

workplace. ... Everyone has strengths and not-so-strong points and when you meet someone outside your normal realm of friends, that person can help build up your nonstrengths."

The conference will be held Aug. 3 at the Cox Pavilion and is sponsored by American Family Insurance, MGM Mirage, Nevada Power and Perini Building Co. Organizers are still looking for sponsors, volunteers and participants for the event. They hope to attract between 500 and 1,000 women from all walks of life the first year.

"The ultimate objective is that we will establish a platform where we are communicating in a meaningful way with each other," Nelson said. "That we're more aware of the things we have in common and that we develop a network of contacts and friends to enable us to support each other, whether it is in business or in family or in our community endeavors."

For more information on the Women of Color Conference 2007, log on to www.lvwomenofcolor.com.