

Lingerie idea trio reach awards final

by Catherine Dalton

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THREE Willenhall businesswomen who triumphed over adversity to set up their own lingerie business have been named finalists in a national competition.

Friends Fiona Wright, Bernice Fletcher and Cath Stone set up Lingerie Illusions, specialising in underwear for women who have had breast surgery.

They are now celebrating being named finalists in the 2008 Barclays Trading Places Awards which recognises men and women who have battled against the odds to change their lives for the better by setting up in business.

Bernice and Fiona have both experienced breast cancer first hand and wanted to use their experiences to help others.

Fiona was 44 when she was diagnosed with the disease in 2005. Fiona's sister in law Cath introduced her to Bernice, who had also been diagnosed with breast cancer that same year.

Bernice underwent a mastectomy, while Fiona elected to have a double mastectomy when her cancer returned in 2007.

Spotted

Finding it hard to get underwear with special pockets to hold prosthetics, the business savvy threesome spotted a gap in the market.

"We were just mumbbling together about the lack of shops that do sell mastectomy bras. There's nothing on the high street so we thought, if it's not there, lets do it ourselves," said Bernice.

So the threesome opened their own service in January this year, based in West Midlands House, in Gipsy Lane.

"We feel we've been there and done that, we know how to relate to the ladies who have just been diagnosed," said Bernice.

"We can sit down with them and say this is our experience, this is who you need to talk to."

She added: "We spend time with the ladies and do proper measuring and fittings, with a one-to-one service."

The women will head to a glittering awards dinner in London on October 7, where the winner will be presented with a cheque for £10,000.

"We're absolutely shocked to be nominated for the award but also really chuffed that what we're doing is actually important," added Bernice.

John Davis, Barclays marketing director for local business and a judge on the panel, said: "I congratulate Fiona, Bernice and Cath on becoming national finalists and hope their inspiring story will prove to other people in Willenhall that self employment can be possible if you've got a dream and the guts and determination to make it work."



Left to right, John Davis, marketing director for local business at Barclays, congratulates Bernice Fletcher, Cath Stone and Fiona Wright, from Lingerie Illusions, who are finalists in the 2008 Barclays Trading Places Awards.

