

# NEW Pioneers

STORIES OF 100 BC WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS



Foreword by Premier Gordon Campbell

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Published by:



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Start. Grow. Succeed.*

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Western Economic  
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Diversification de l'économie  
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Canada



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# Dedication



In memory of Kathy Barnett 1959 – 2008

Co-founder and Publisher, Pique Newsmagazine, Whistler, 1994 - 2008

Whistler Business Person of the Year, 2002

Board Member, Women's Enterprise Centre, 2002 – 2008

Vice -Chair, Women's Enterprise Centre, 2006 – 2008

President, Community Foundation of Whistler, 2006

Member, BC Small Business Round Table, 2005 – 2008

Chair, Whistler Chamber of Commerce, 2004

Supporter, Tourism Whistler, Women of Whistler

Kathy was a true role model for all women entrepreneurs.

# Preface

This book, *New Pioneers: Stories of 100 BC Women Entrepreneurs* is a celebration of the pioneering spirit of 100 contemporary women entrepreneurs from around the province. At Women's Enterprise Centre, we feel it is not only important to recognize and celebrate our entrepreneurial roots, but also essential to record those accomplishments for the generations to come.

No longer limited by traditional societal views of what constitutes 'women's work', today's female entrepreneurs are boundless in their dreams and the type of businesses they own. These days, it is no more surprising to see a woman who owns a software company or an adventure travel company than it is to see a woman-owned clothing store or beauty salon.

It is our belief that society must encourage women of all ages, ethnicities and life stages to view business ownership as a valuable career option. And, it would appear that the citizens of BC agree. In a recent survey, 94 per cent of the respondents said entrepreneurship is a valuable option for women and 98 per cent agreed that women entrepreneurs are important role models for girls and women.

Unfortunately, in that same survey, only 40 per cent of the respondents could identify a woman entrepreneur.

It is our hope that this book will build that awareness and encourage, influence, inspire, provide role models and motivate women and girls to consider entrepreneurship. The stories in this book showcase the successes and challenges which BC women entrepreneurs have faced. The book also highlights the support these women have received from friends, family members, women's business networks and business service providers such as ourselves.

We first got to know many of these women when we asked local business service providers to tell us about entrepreneurs who were employing the techniques we teach in our workshops. Many of the New Pioneers profiled were gracious enough to share their time and experiences as storytellers for workshops and training events offered by Women's Enterprise Centre in their home communities. Many came to us for support, because the traditional lenders were unable to finance their business ideas.

We had some tough choices to make in selecting the final stories that appear in the book and we couldn't feature all the women we interviewed. The following criteria were used to help us identify the New Pioneers. The women chosen have 51 per cent or more ownership of their business. They must also be a 'pioneer' in some sense: perhaps they were the first in their community or region with their product or service; or maybe they're an innovator in a delivery model, product or idea; they may be working to keep their traditions alive or promote their culture; they may have encountered unique life circumstances which require a courageous pioneering spirit to overcome; or perhaps they own a business in a non-traditional industry.

We looked for representation from each region of the province, Northern BC, Kootenay Rockies, Thompson Okanagan, Lower Mainland & South Coast, Vancouver, and Victoria & the Islands. We also sought stories that represented the various cultures and ethnic groups living in BC as well as a cross-section of age ranging from under 35 to over 55 years.

No matter what the industry, age, cultural background, or region in which they live, these women are deserving of the title and recognition as New Pioneers in BC business. We know there are many, many more women whose stories we'd love to tell. Perhaps there will be a Volume 2!

# Acknowledgements

On behalf of Women's Enterprise Centre, I would like to acknowledge the many people and organizations involved in this project.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of: Western Economic Diversification Canada, BC Ministry of Small Business and Revenue, BDC, Black Press, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, and the assistance of the British Columbia Museums Association.

I would like to thank the Women's Business Networks throughout the province, many of which are featured in this book, for their support and mentoring of women entrepreneurs in their communities.

Thank you also to the writers and editors: Sara Couper, Billie Dobbs, Jane Eamon, Kathy Fahey, Tracey Frederickson, Darcy Nybo, Dawn Renaud, and Marilyn Strong. Thank you to Andrea Lindal who produced the book, with design assistance from Madhouse Creative

Inc. We owe a big debt of gratitude to Marilyn Strong, a pioneer in her own right. She was the project manager on this ambitious initiative, who outdid herself this time!

I would also like to acknowledge two tireless champions of small business in BC: the former Minister of Small Business and Revenue, Rick Thorpe, and the former Minister of Community Services, Ida Chong. Your vision and efforts have made the province stronger and more vibrant economically. Your active support of Women's Enterprise Centre initiatives to assist women business owners in BC over the last several years has helped to change people's lives for the better, as evidenced in many of the stories featured in this book.

The final acknowledgement must go to the New Pioneers themselves, whose tenacity, courage and fortitude motivated us to create this compendium of women entrepreneurs. I hope it inspires you as much as creating this book has inspired us!



Laurel Douglas, CEO  
Women's Enterprise Centre  
September 1, 2008

# Foreword

As British Columbia celebrates its 150th anniversary, there is no better time to recognize the critical role women entrepreneurs have played in building the province we live in today.

Since 1995, Women's Enterprise Centre has been helping women start, grow and succeed in business by providing advice and loans, training and mentors. Small businesses are the most important component of BC's economy, with companies with fewer than 50 employees representing 98 per cent of all businesses in British Columbia and creating over one million jobs. Moreover, almost 36 per cent of BC's small business owners are women.

The face of BC business is as diverse as its geography. No two stories are alike. These women range in age from under 25 to over 75, and come from all regions of the province and from a huge range of cultural and economic backgrounds including First Nations.

Whatever their background, they are all New Pioneers of BC business. They have demonstrated the passion and commitment needed to give effect to ideas, and turn those ideas into viable businesses. From birch bark biting to broadcasting, from seafood marketing to encryption software, these women have proven themselves as visionaries

and critical thinkers, risk-takers and organizers.

The women featured in this book have risen to the challenges of entrepreneurship and business management. Each one is an inspiration, whose individual story has made an important contribution to the ongoing story of British Columbia.

“The women featured in this book have risen to the challenges of entrepreneurship...”



Gordon Campbell, Premier  
Province of British Columbia  
September 1, 2008



# Table of Contents



Preface .....	5	Lower Mainland & South Coast Women’s Business Networks .....	84
Foreword		Vancouver	
by Premier Gordon Campbell.....	7	New Pioneers.....	87
Introduction .....	11	Vancouver Women’s Business Networks.....	107
British Columbia Regions for New Pioneers.....	13	Victoria and the Islands	
Northern BC		New Pioneers.....	109
New Pioneers.....	15	Victoria and the Islands Women’s Business Networks .....	129
Kootenay Rockies		Other BC Women in Business Organizations .....	131
New Pioneers.....	29	Contributors.....	133
Thompson Okanagan		Index.....	137
New Pioneers.....	41	About Women’s Enterprise Centre .....	141
Thompson Okanagan Women’s Business Networks.....	59		
Lower Mainland & South Coast			
New Pioneers.....	61		



# Introduction

## **Women Entrepreneurs are Here to Stay**

Women-owned businesses have been increasing in numbers all over the country. By the end of the 1970's, over 200,000 women were running their own business in Canada. By 1990, that number had jumped to half a million. Today, over 800,000 women in Canada own a business, and that's expected to reach 1 million by 2010.

In 1995, there were about 98,000 women-owned businesses in BC. By 2004, BC Stats reported that 137,000 women owned a business; a 41 per cent increase in ten years. We expect women will continue to own at least 35 per cent of all small businesses in BC in the future.

Who is the typical BC woman entrepreneur today? Her average age is 43 years old. In fact, almost half the women business owners right now are under the age of 45. The typical woman-owned business might have 2 – 4 employees, including herself. She has likely financed her business on her own or through friends and family as she is probably very nervous about taking on debt. She is most likely married, and has a one-in-three chance of having kids under the age of 12. She probably has no prior management training. Her business is perhaps in the service sector, maybe a spa or a salon, possibly food service or retail. In fact, 70 per cent of women-owned businesses today are in the service sector.

While this may be a good description of the typical BC woman entrepreneur, there's more. Immigrant and aboriginal women represent a growing share of these numbers. One in five self-employed BC women were not born in Canada, and immigrant women are starting businesses 30 per cent faster than immigrant men. Aboriginal women own almost half of the aboriginal businesses in BC, much higher than the provincial average of 35 per cent.

In the next 10 years, more women over 55 will make the transition to running

their own business. That is the fastest growing group of women business owners in BC and they are starting businesses at twice the rate of men their age. This 'transitioner' group (or seniorpreneurs) is going to represent one third of all women business owners in BC by 2015.

That's the face of women entrepreneurs today, however it's changing. In the past decade, the number of women entrepreneurs with business degrees has gone up by more than 10 per cent a year. That's twice the pace of men. They're also going into higher-skilled occupations, which is raising their average income.

Women have a very holistic set of motivations for getting into business for themselves. The simple indicators of success from the past: sales, profit and number of employees, just don't tell the whole story anymore. Based on a 2006 study done by Women's Enterprise Centre, women consider business performance to be very important, but they also rate very highly their own personal satisfaction, and work-life balance. These New Pioneers are no different. And this holistic approach is now becoming more accepted in all circles as the true measure of success for all entrepreneurs.

## **About the New Pioneers**

Because each woman is unique, you won't find any one person who exactly fits the above description in this book. What you will find are everyday women who have done something extraordinary: they started and succeeded in their own business. In spite of the odds, in spite of the personal, family, community and geographic challenges they believed in themselves and their passion. They made it happen.

Some started their business on a shoestring; some with personal or family loans; and some with help from lenders like Women's Enterprise Centre.

# Introduction cont'd...

In fact, thirty-six of the women profiled in this book are our loan clients. Fifty-seven of the women featured were volunteer storytellers at a Women's Enterprise Centre workshop or have been featured in one of our Resource Guides. Eight women are volunteer mentors with our mentoring program, fifteen have taken one or more of our workshops and forty-two received our business advisory services.

Many of the women featured in this book belong to local women's business networks. These organizations support and mentor women entrepreneurs and provide opportunities for women to take on different types of leadership roles.

From Queen Charlotte City to Sparwood and Fort St. John to White Rock, BC women entrepreneurs are also influencing leadership styles in business. The 'command and control' style of business leadership that existed in the business world 25 years ago is now passé. It's been replaced with a more collaborative approach, which treats employees as equals and values the sharing of power and information. This approach to leadership is the style which women naturally use. The business world is adopting our way of leading, and it will make women leaders more and more in demand in future!

It is our hope that the profiles in this book will build awareness of women entrepreneurs, their challenges and successes, and provide inspiration and role models for women and girls.

## **How did we do?**

To help gauge the success of this book we need your help. To entice you to answer eight short questions about the book, we are offering a \$300 spa package to a spa of your choice anywhere in BC.

The questionnaire will be available on the Women's Enterprise Centre website, [womensenterprise.ca](http://womensenterprise.ca) until June 30, 2009 and we encourage you to visit our website to give us your feedback.

## **What can you do?**

If you live in or are visiting one of the New Pioneers' communities, please take a few minutes to acknowledge her.

One last suggestion: if somewhere in your life, there is a young girl or a woman who expresses an interest in owning her own business we hope you'll gift her with this book, or encourage her in some other way. As baby boomers retire and exit their businesses, it is our obligation to encourage the younger generations to step up to the plate and take over so we can continue to enjoy the wonderful standard of living we have here in beautiful BC, "*the best place on earth*"!

# British Columbia Regions for New Pioneers







# Northern BC

Alexander, Diana .....	16	Greenberg, Jennifer .....	22
Barton, Betty .....	17	Griffith, Eryn .....	23
Davidson, Ramona .....	18	Levac, Angelique .....	24
Dixon-Warren, Heloise .....	19	Mclvor, Kim .....	25
Gifford Brown, Janet .....	20	Wilson, Tara .....	26
Gower, Tryna .....	21	Woodward, Tana .....	27



## Diana Alexander

SANTE SKIN & LASER CENTRE  
104 4644 LAZELLE AVENUE, TERRACE, BC  
250.638.0250 | [www.santeskinandlaser.ca](http://www.santeskinandlaser.ca)

When Diana Alexander left her government job to train as a medical esthetician, she unleashed an entrepreneurial passion she didn't know she had in her. In the blur of five short years, she has evolved her home-based business into a state-of-the-art laser treatment facility and one of the leading day spa and salons in the northwestern region of the province.

While she worked from home the first year, "I asked every client what kind of services they were looking for, from botox to photo rejuvenation," Diana says. With that primary market research driving her business plan, she bought her first piece of laser equipment and moved to a storefront location which she called the Sante Skin & Laser Centre. Within a year, eight new treatment rooms, additional equipment and four more staff were added.

As she continued to listen to her customers, the opportunity to add a day spa component to the business was evident. Needing yet more space, Diana and her husband bought the building she was located in and Studio 3 Salon & Spa, an Aveda concept salon and spa, opened in May 2007. The two businesses now fall under the umbrella of the newly formed Elite Beauty Group Inc.

When balancing her home life with two young children while working in the business and managing the spa with 26 employees became too unwieldy, Diana realized she needed help. In stepped her recently retired husband, Tim, to manage the spa for her. "I realized after we opened the spa that I had been operating with a great deal of optimism and a certain amount of naiveté," Diana says. "I couldn't have done it without the support of my husband and my parents."

In her roles as a mentor and storyteller for Women's Enterprise Centre and as a community volunteer, Diana happily shares the lessons she has learned.

*"Make sure you're always on top of things and when you do that risk analysis part of your business plan, be sure it is realistic and honest!"*

“I realized... I had been operating with a great deal of optimism and a certain amount of naiveté”

# Betty Barton

BARTON CONSTRUCTION LTD.  
3682 HAWTHORN AVENUE, TERRACE, BC  
250.635.6244

One of the highlights of Betty Barton's youth was visiting construction sites with her dad, a building contractor who hoped one of his five children would be attracted to the industry. His hope was fulfilled.

Today, Betty is the owner of a leading construction company in Terrace. Often considered a man's world, Betty never thought a career in construction was wading into uncharted waters. "But I was advised by my mom to get a good university education to fall back on," she points out. She earned a business degree and feels it has been extremely valuable. Her desire to be a building contractor was always the motivating factor, even when she encountered obstacles. "I've learned you don't have to be mean to work in a guy's world, but you do have to be firm and not allow yourself to be pushed around."

Betty feels open communication with her clients is a huge factor in Barton Construction's success over the past 17 years. Using a philosophy of "building one house at a time," she is in regular contact with her customers, updating them daily and dealing with any issues or concerns right away. Her company has weathered the fluctuating northern BC economy by branching out into commercial and industrial construction, but residential

remains Betty's passion. She maintains hands-on involvement with every home, whether she's delivering lumber onto the job site or helping with the painting.

Betty's unconventional career is inspirational and she devotes considerable time helping other entrepreneurs reach their own goals. She is a past president of the Terrace and District Chamber of Commerce, has worked as a liaison with the National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP) through Northwest Community College and sits as a director and owner of the Shames Mountain Ski Corporation. Women working in the trades are often part of the Barton crew and they do apprenticeship training with the company as well.

"I enjoy being on the job site as much today as when I was a child," Betty says, "I can't imagine ever not doing this!"

*"Work at your business not in it.  
Make it work for you, not you work for it."*



Al Richardson

“If your customers trust and believe in you, they'll be your biggest advocates”



“Operating the business as a family means we treat each and every employee as if they were my brother or sister and without reliable, honest and dependable staff, I could not be succeeding”

## Ramona Davidson

COFFEE TALK EXPRESS/THE PENCIL BOX/RAMONA'S PROMOTIONS  
BOX 51, CHETWYND, BC  
250.788.3422 | [www.coffeetalkexpress.com](http://www.coffeetalkexpress.com)

Ramona Davidson's business is all about building on what's positive in her community. She has applied the same principles to her own life. When she was unemployed in the late 1990's she decided to use her accounting background in a totally unrelated business. Her business acquaintances were encouraging her to start up a newspaper. There was already another local paper, but she was convinced she could do better and went into business anyway.

Within a couple of months from the initial concept, the first issue of Coffee Talk Express was printed. "We have taken the newspaper concept and put a community focus on it," says Ramona, "with the emphasis on what is good in the community. We keep the community informed but we don't search out bad or negative news."

Ramona says she was "attracted to the business, liked computer work, and just did it." Her accounting background has helped her to keep her company profitable. "From day one, we've always been in the black. If we can't do it without going into debt, we don't do it: we save until we can afford it." She started without a nest egg, but her initial costs were minimal, as she had

the use of a photocopier and other equipment.

Today, her business has grown to include a stationery store, The Pencil Box, as well as a marketing and promotions company, Ramona's Promotions.

Ramona believes an entrepreneur is someone who wants to follow their dream and doesn't let anyone stop them. She has successfully met the challenges of staying alive in business and of finding and keeping great staff. "Operating the business as a family means we treat each and every employee as if they were my brother or sister and without reliable, honest and dependable staff, I could not be succeeding."

Financially, the business has also been a success and Ramona is busier than she has ever been. She feels fortunate to have the full support of her husband.

"He's my hidden backbone," she says, and she credits the rest of her family too. "My whole family supports what I do. Without that support I don't think I could do what I have done."

*"When you are in business, be honest.  
Be honest to yourself and your customers."*

# Heloise Dixon-Warren

MOOSE MEADOWS FARM  
2861 NAZKO ROAD, QUESNEL, BC  
250.249.5329 | [www.moosemeadowsfarm.ca](http://www.moosemeadowsfarm.ca)

Heloise Dixon-Warren found out early in her life as an entrepreneur that adapting to one's situation is the key to being successful. Heloise and her husband were foresters looking for a small farm. When they discovered the smallest property they could buy was 65 acres, they had to expand their thinking.

They started Moose Meadows Farm in April 2002 with a plan. "It quickly became obvious that for our farm to work, we needed to be diverse," says Heloise. "The farm incorporates agri-tourism, agri-forestry, non-timber forest products such as Christmas trees, birch syrup and evergreen floral (wreaths, swags and garlands) in addition to more traditional farm products like free-range eggs, alpaca and llama fibre products, horse pasture and wild jellies."

"We built our business slowly," says Heloise. "The type of business we opted to do is unusual and people have really embraced it."

But change has always been a constant. "As Charles Darwin said, 'adapt... or die.' We have adapted to the current trends," says Heloise. "For example we make natural wreaths that started on a small basis. We listened

to our customers, built a website and the growth just in that one area has been exponential." They have since branched out to consulting for forestry and non-timber forest products like the birch syrup industry.

Heloise has also authored Canada's only birch syrup production manual which has since gone international. In 2006, she was instrumental in establishing Farming Agriculture Rural Marketing Eco Diversification (FARMED), an organization dedicated to providing networking, partnerships, mentoring and educational opportunities for its members. She currently serves as its president and she received the 'Award of Excellence for Innovation in Agriculture' from the Investment Agriculture Foundation.

"It's been wonderful," says Heloise. "We love where we are and what we are doing. It's a great place to bring up our girls. I'm able to take my education and apply it in a different way other than stomping through the forest. It enables me to spend more time at home."

*"You have to have the three P's – persistence, passion and planning."*



Gord Perry "Perry's Picture Place"

“You have to accept that just because you want to do something doesn't mean the general public will want to buy it”



“Start small; don’t get too ambitious to begin with. Take baby steps”

## Janet Gifford Brown

NORTHWEST COAST BOOKS  
PO BOX 670, QUEEN CHARLOTTE CITY, BC  
250.559.4681 | [www.nwcbooks.com](http://www.nwcbooks.com)

Janet Gifford Brown spent ten years working in a bookstore that specialized in Pacific Northwest Coast native and Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) subjects, in Queen Charlotte City. When the owner passed away, Janet kept the store running for his family. In 2003, she used a small inheritance and a loan from a friend to buy it from the estate. In a town of less than 1,000 people, this tiny niche bookstore now generates half its revenue from international sales and that was before high-speed Internet arrived on the islands!

Northwest Coast Books is everything Haida Gwaii, offering rare one-of-a-kind books about the islands and Pacific Northwest Coast. Janet’s is the only bookstore exclusive to the region and she delights in being able to find out of print books for clients.

Owning a bookstore hadn’t really figured into Janet’s career plans and although she had the opportunity to purchase a business with which she was familiar, it was difficult to lose her mentor. “He taught me everything I know about running a business,” she says of previous owner Bill Ellis. “Before that it had never even crossed my mind.”

“My life hasn’t changed that much since taking over

except I have more responsibilities than I did before,” she says. “There is considerably more worry in life when the business belongs to you instead of someone else. Now I have to stop and think before I do things as there is no one else there to figure out what is going on.” These days, she is assisted at work by her trained border collie and her African grey parrot.

Janet was once focused on wholesale. “Now I am moving towards the retail end of the business sales via the website and focusing more on schools and libraries,” she says. She has added her own photography and artwork to the inventory, as well as helping other local artists by carrying their goods in the store.

According to Janet, success is being proud of what you are doing or with what you have done. “It’s being comfortable and enjoying it,” she says, “even if it isn’t bringing in large amounts of money.”

She says entrepreneurs need persistence, imagination and the ability to ask for advice—and pay attention to it—when you need it.

*“There is considerably more worry in life when the business belongs to you instead of someone else.”*

# Tryna Gower

TRYNA GOWER PHOTOGRAPHY  
BOX 35, DAWSON CREEK, BC  
250.782.4671 | [www.trynagowerphotography.com](http://www.trynagowerphotography.com)

Tryna Gower got her first camera when she was 17 and says she has been a shutterbug ever since. She took lessons at a local college then studied at the New York Institute of Photography.

Despite her passion for photography, Tryna says she never really wanted to make it her business because she was afraid it would lose its lustre. Eventually her friends convinced her to open a studio in 2000 but it wasn't until 2002 that she officially considered it launched. "I needed it to be flexible," she says.

Although there were photographers in the area doing the usual "say cheese" family shots, Tryna says she was the first in her area to start a home-based photography business and the first to be mobile. That meant she was able to develop her name and reputation before similar photography studios opened up. She now has a full indoor studio facility and a full outdoor studio with breathtaking views.

At first, business was very slow. "Basically, I didn't make any money for the first four years," she says. "I never got a loan; I bought everything with cash. I was lucky I didn't have to work for income. Now I'm making money."

Her advice to potential entrepreneurs: "Learn basic business skills. There's a difference between learning your craft and learning basic business skills; you need both."

The flexible hours Tryna's business offers work well for her. She values her relationship with her husband and her children and never misses the opportunity to be with them for the "important" things. "I'm a person full of zigs and zags. I can't work 9 to 5 so this works for me. Sometimes I'm in my studio at midnight working."

"My business looks 10 times better now than when I planned it eight years ago," she says. "I'm doing more artistic photographs and leaning towards doing photography for publishing and printing. It's a much bigger scale."

*"Learn basic business skills.  
There's a difference between learning your craft and  
learning basic business skills; you need both."*



Tryna Gower

“I’m a person full of zigs and zags. I can’t work 9 to 5 so this works for me. Sometimes I’m in my studio at midnight working”



# Jennifer Greenberg

PHOENIX FIRST AID SERVICES INC.  
PO BOX 21097, DAWSON CREEK, BC  
250.262.4990

“I absolutely loved stepping into this traditional male world and learning about drilling and production”

All women entrepreneurs have to be tenacious, but it takes a special kind of determination to work in the rough terrain of Canada’s wilderness. Jennifer Greenberg has proven she has the right stuff.

Jennifer was in the process of applying to medical schools when she learned she was pregnant with her third child. Instead of ending her career plans, the news simply caused her to shift gears and enroll in an industrial first aid program instead. It wasn’t long before contract opportunities to do first aid work for the oil and gas industry in remote areas of BC and Alberta emerged and Phoenix First Aid Inc. was born.

She bought her first truck and prepared to head north where the work was. The truck was backordered but that didn’t stop Jennifer. With help from her grandfather and a loan from Women’s Enterprise Centre, she bought a temporary mobile treatment unit to put on the back of a rental truck. She drove the 1,000 miles from her home in Merritt to Fort St. John and started knocking on doors. On her second day, she landed a three-week contract with a pipeline company that ended up lasting five months. That led to another contract and within three months of starting her business, Jennifer had three trucks and knew

she had found her calling.

“Growing up in the Okanagan I had never driven a 4 x 4, put chains on a vehicle or gone out and worked in the bush, but I absolutely loved stepping into this traditional male world and learning about drilling and production,” she says.

The business has grown quickly due to Jennifer’s ability to jump in and get the job done without worrying about obstacles. She also has tremendous support from her mother and grandmother. “I would never have made it this far without their help,” she says.

With expectations of owning 10 trucks and having at least 30 employees by the end of 2008, finding the right balance between the time she spends in the field and required time in the office is Jennifer’s greatest challenge. “We’re certainly not the largest first aid company in the industry but I won’t achieve my vision for the business if making money is the only consideration,” she says. “It’s my passion for medicine that I must be true to.”

*“I won’t achieve my vision for the business if making money is the only consideration.”*

# Eryn Griffith

THE ARTFUL CUP/URBAN COLOUR  
4554 LAKELSE AVENUE, TERRACE, BC  
250.635.2263



Starting a restaurant is one of the highest risk ventures any entrepreneur can take on. Make it a vegetarian restaurant in a resource-based town in northern BC and the risk is even greater, especially for an entrepreneur with no formal business experience. For Eryn Griffith, starting The Artful Cup, a vegetarian café in Terrace, was not only something she wanted to do; she knew the time was right for such a venue in this growing community.

Prior to moving to Terrace, Eryn had lived in Montreal and Victoria where successful vegetarian-style restaurants were relatively common and she missed being able to dine out at such an establishment in Terrace. She decided to open one. The Artful Cup, as its name suggests, incorporates a funky décor including art by local artists and provides an urban coffee culture atmosphere.

In the beginning, there were long and demanding hours; often it was Eryn who came in at five a.m. to do the baking and who was still there to close up around midnight. But her efforts paid off with a loyal following. Ready for a new business challenge, she sold the restaurant in 2007.

Next, she tapped into the retail sector in downtown Terrace, taking on a partner to help her run Urban Colour,

a funky, eclectic clothing store with a specific target market. “I wanted mothers to be able to shop here with their teenagers,” explains Eryn. “There wasn’t anything similar for this group in the area and I could see myself wanting such a place for my two kids in a few years.” Urban Colour supports mostly Canadian designers and carries several lines exclusively. Items range from one-of-a-kind T-shirts to vintage clothing, many made with enviro-friendly fabrics.

Having a partner provided Eryn with the flexibility she needed to manage the business around her growing family and someone to bounce ideas off of. As they enter their third year, Urban Colour is adding new lines and looking at creating an on-line store as well.

*“I wanted mothers to be able to shop here with their teenagers. I could see myself wanting such a place in a few years.”*

“I’m learning as I go and at the same time putting my stamp on my own little part of downtown”

Alex Zander



# Angelique Levac

ANGELIQUE'S NATIVE ARTS  
433 GEORGE STREET, PRINCE GEORGE, BC  
250.561.2339 | [www.angeliquesnativeart.com](http://www.angeliquesnativeart.com)

Angelique Levac has found a business she can really sink her teeth into, literally.

She first became intrigued in the 1980's when she read about a Cree woman who wanted to pass on the ancient art of birch bark biting. After many arduous trips and lessons, Angelique became a skilled craftsperson, one of only three women in Canada today who practice the art of birch bark biting, which involves folding and biting the innermost layer of select birch bark into a variety of forms.

Despite discouragement from various family members and friends along the way, she held fast to her dream and it has paid off.

In 1992, the uniqueness of her art caught the eye of Bill Cosby who asked Angelique to appear on the television game show "You Bet Your Life". Angelique won \$12,600 and put the money towards a van so she could travel to various native craft shows and sell her artwork. By 1994 Angelique had saved another \$4,000 and used it to open Angelique's Native Arts where she showcases her bitings, earrings, her sister's moose hair tuftings and small carvings. She buys art for her store from local

artists whenever she can.

"I've learned a lot about the industry and what sells over the last 14 years," she says. Angelique's success is both personal and professional. "People tell me that I have proven that our people can do anything. I like being an inspiration to others. I like being able to carry on the work of other native artists."

Angelique, whose artwork was recently featured in Homemaker's magazine and the Globe and Mail, is now a leader in her community, with compassion for other people and a willingness to try anything.

*"Be willing to take the time to make your business grow."*

“No matter what anybody tells you, if they try to discourage you, never take them seriously. The sky is the limit; you can do anything you set your mind to.”

# Kim McIvor

BIRCH PLACE FARM  
10151 LEE ROAD, QUESNEL, BC  
250.747.8455 | [www.birchplacefarm.com](http://www.birchplacefarm.com)

While the old adage of “success is sweet and sweeter if long delayed and gotten through many struggles and defeats” may not be the ideal motto for an entrepreneur, it has certainly become Kim McIvor’s reality.

Kim and her partner, Pete Thumand, own Birch Place Farm outside of Quesnel and produce deliciously unique ‘golden nectar’ in the form of birch syrup.

The couple started experimenting with syrup-making in the late 1990’s and it took three years “before the product was even palatable, let alone saleable,” Kim says. Harvesting and processing the syrup requires a demanding, labour-intensive process and the couple had to learn about everything from chemistry to food safety standards, website design and marketing.

Over the years, Kim and Pete have continually invested in better equipment with the help of Community Futures to increase the quantity of syrup they could produce. The journey from the first craft fair where they sold their syrup to today where Sugar Spring Classic Birch Syrup is sold through a local gift shop and Birch Place Farm’s website, has been an arduous one, but one that has paid off.

Although it took years to fine-tune the process of

making and marketing the syrup, the sweet taste of success is finally being realized through the tapping of 700 birch trees in order to meet the demand. Until recently, producing birch syrup has been a sideline to the farm’s primary business of raising registered Percheron horses, Dexter cattle and Blue Heeler dogs. Their goal is complete independence and the demand for the syrup has provided the vehicle to do that.

In 2005, their Sugar Spring Classic Birch Syrup was named “One of the Top 10 Gifts in BC” by the Vancouver Province newspaper and in 2005, Kim was recognized as Innovative Woman of the Year by the Northern British Columbia Today’s Woman Awards.

Kim likes people to know that tapping the birch trees for sap does not hurt them and that her product comes in three sizes for a very good reason: “I’ve achieved my entrepreneurial goal; everyone can afford to enjoy birch syrup.”

*“It took three years before the product was even palatable, let alone saleable.”*



Eva Grandell

“We don’t want to lose touch with what we enjoy about the manufacturing process”



“Know that they [employees] will make mistakes from time to time but so will you”

## Tara Wilson

RUINS BOARD SHOP  
4706 LAKELSE AVENUE, TERRACE, BC  
250.635.9404 | [www.ruins.ca](http://www.ruins.ca)

It's all her mother's fault. "My mom said I was a grown-up from age 8," says Tara Wilson with a smile. "She never bought me children's books so I had to watch a lot of news and read a lot of Stephen King novels."

Tara's early 'maturity' also gave her a head start as an entrepreneur when, at 18, she followed her passion for board sports and began a home-based business. Within two years, she opened her first board shop in Terrace. By 2006, she had two more locations in Prince George and Quesnel.

Ruins is a specialty board shop that carries snow boards, wake boards, skateboards and all gear associated with board sports.

"I didn't have a vision or a plan in the beginning," Tara says. She just had the idea, and got a business licence and a supplier, and was open within two weeks. Early in her business, she went through the Community Futures Self-Employment Program, did up a business plan and was approved for a small line of credit from the local credit union. "When I started I was young and enthusiastic and the community was receptive to my energy and enthusiasm for the industry," she says. "Things have just

happened and continue to happen so quickly that I've never been able to do the detailed business planning that every business advisor says is important."

Despite the lack of formal planning, Tara knows that you "don't grow any faster than you can afford to: make sure you have financial and professional support." She also advises potential entrepreneurs that "you really need to learn how to delegate and trust your key employees to represent your company. Know that they will make mistakes from time to time but so will you."

Tara has literally grown up with the business. "I ended up marrying Tyler, one of my key employees and I'm now a mom," she says. "After over a decade in business he has re-ignited my entrepreneurial spirit. We still work together today and his companionship carries me through the challenges of self-employment."

*"I was playing store to get some deals for myself but the demand was overwhelming and it just happened."*

# Tana Woodward

TANA WOODWARD & ASSOCIATES - VIRTUAL OFFICE SERVICES  
PRINCE GEORGE, BC  
1.866.970.0015 | [www.virtualofficeservices.ca](http://www.virtualofficeservices.ca)

Never meeting the people you work with might seem odd, but with today's technology of wireless Internet connections, fax machines and cell phones, it is possible to work 'virtually' from anywhere in the world. In 2002, Tana Woodward was looking for a new challenge and a way to balance work and family when she read an article in Costco magazine about Virtual Assistants.

"I was immediately drawn to it," says Tana, who had provided administrative support for municipal, provincial and public employers throughout BC. She enrolled in a Community Futures self-employment program and about six months from the initial idea, she launched Tana Woodward & Associates - Virtual Office Services.

At the time, most people had not heard of Virtual Assistants and because the concept was new, "I had to educate them," she says. A Virtual Assistant (or VA) is generally defined as an on-line administrative/executive assistant who is an entrepreneur and who partners with clients to ensure the client's business is successful.

Tana has had to be flexible with her initial business concept. "When I first started, I had different services I planned to offer, but that has changed depending on

client demand," she says. "When there is a need I will take it on, if my skill level allows." She helps business managers free up their own time for more important tasks by completing "paperwork" projects, such as project assistance, PowerPoint presentations, data entry and creating proposals, manuals and newsletters.

Tana says her role model is Michelle Jamison, one of the first women to start a virtual office assistance company. "She's very professional, really clear and concise on who she is and what services her company offers," she says, "and she is willing to help anyone starting out as a VA."

Tana was awarded Northern BC Business Industry's E-Business Award in 2003 and she was nominated for the Chamber's 2007 Home Based Business Award. "Success for me is when you are doing a good job at something you love and are able to contribute to the family income," says Tana, who finds there is now less stress with family life. "It's been good to be available for my teenagers."

*"I actually look forward to going to work now. I'm in control of my own destiny."*



“my Advice to others...  
Business Plan, Business  
Plan, Business Plan”





# Kootenay Rockies

Acheson, Kelly .....	30	LeMoel, Karen.....	35
Callahan, Heather .....	31	Pallesen, Denise .....	36
Florence, Elinor.....	32	Palmer, Brenda .....	37
Hayes, Amber .....	30	Rella, Cathy .....	38
Huppie, Maya .....	33	Tomlinson, Lila .....	39
Ironmonger, Gina .....	34	Wong, Lindsay .....	40



“Do your homework. You have to know who your customers are and if they even exist”

## Kelly Acheson & Amber Hayes

ADVENTURE ENGINE INC.  
BOX 1108, ROSSLAND, BC  
800.993.6648 | [www.adventureengine.com](http://www.adventureengine.com)

When Kelly Acheson and Amber Hayes launched Adventure Engine, a tech company that provides booking management systems to suppliers in the adventure and experiential travel industries, they thought they had the ideal entrepreneurial opportunity.

They had targeted and defined the niche market: small to mid-size tour operators, who needed to offer their clients the opportunity to book trips on-line, 24/7. They made the service accessible from anywhere and along with booking management, the program provided clients with custom reporting and client data management. It's a service that would cost a tour operator hundreds of thousands of dollars if they did it on their own. Plus, it was the only database of its type in the world.

With high expectations for a successful business, Kelly and Amber incorporated in July 2004 and launched live on the Internet in May 2005.

The first bump in the road came when they were turned down for a loan because they were told it was too risky. "Our plan didn't have proof of revenues," says Kelly. They fine-tuned their projections and eventually received loans from the BDC and Community Futures.

"Reality set in on what the company could actually do in five years," says Kelly. "We forecasted high and aren't

there yet. At first we thought we'd have more travel agents interested but it's growing a lot slower than expected."

"We've evolved the company and identified who our ideal client is and now we can provide for them in every aspect of their business needs," says Amber. "We still believe we can become world leaders in the adventure travel industry niche, just how we are doing that has changed."

They are now beginning to reap the rewards of hard work, flexibility and analysis with over 1,000 trips in their database, dozens of clients globally and growing every day.

"We increased our pricing and became consultants offering complete technical solutions with support and service to go along with it. We've been nominated for several technology and innovation awards and now enjoy requests for industry expert speaking engagements at global conferences such as the Adventure Travel Trade Association World Summit," said Kelly. "We have also successfully worked with Northwest Territories Tourism and Newfoundland Tourism to establish effective marketing and on-line booking solutions."

*"Business is a lot of work. You have to be prepared. It is not easy but it is very rewarding."*

# Heather Callahan

FERNIE ATHLETIC THERAPY AND REHABILITATION  
901 5TH AVENUE, FERNIE, BC  
250.423.4800

The town of Fernie, in the extreme southeastern part of BC, is a mecca for winter activities and sports enthusiasts, and not surprisingly, a healthy number of sports injuries occur here. With little in the area in the way of treatment services for such injuries, Fernie resident Heather Callahan saw an opportunity to start her own business. In less than two years, the demand for her high quality one-on-one athletic care has turned Fernie Athletic Therapy and Rehabilitation into a unique treatment facility for this part of the province.

Heather, a Certified Athletic Therapist, was looking for a change from the work she did with the local ski patrol which was mostly limited to quick assessments and treatments. "Starting my own business was the only way I could gain employment in the field I had invested my university education and experience in, without limiting my growth or income-earning potential," she says. Plus she was driven by that essential entrepreneurial quality: a passion for her work. "I love being able to help people every day, getting to know them and their injuries in order to offer a very personalized and effective service."

Building partnerships with other treatment professionals has proven to be one of the best types of marketing for Heather. She takes the time to get to know other

therapists such as chiropractors and massage therapists, their treatment strengths and techniques. She also tries to observe orthopaedic surgeries from time to time. "Watching the latest techniques of reconstructive surgery on a knee ligament, for example, I can use the knowledge I gain to enhance the way I manage future rehabilitation."

Through a partnership with a local custom foot orthotics fabricator, Heather has taken over the assessment of the feet, posture and gait portion, and is doing the computer scan to create a virtual orthotic before it is made.

Consistent involvement with community groups, local sports teams and clubs adds to her perspective on sports injuries, and to her profile.

The rapid growth and increasing referrals to Heather's business reflect a "simple business plan based on very high quality service," she feels. "The most important thing I've learned is that uncompromising quality is a guaranteed key to success."

*"I love being able to help people every day..."*



Bernie Palmer

“The most important thing I’ve learned is that uncompromising quality is a guaranteed key to success”



“I am working and doing something I love at a time when most of my colleagues are thinking about retiring.”

## Elinor Florence

THE COLUMBIA VALLEY PIONEER  
BOX 868, INVERMERE, BC  
250.341.6299 | [www.columbiavalleypioneer.com](http://www.columbiavalleypioneer.com)

When Elinor Florence, now aged 57, purchased a fledgling community newspaper in 2004 it was like falling in love for the first time. Armed with a degree in journalism and 30 years of background as a reporter and editor, Elinor says she jumped at the chance to purchase the Invermere-based newspaper. “It took me five minutes to say yes. I saw a great opportunity to return to what I loved most,” she says.

Elinor was the first woman city editor of the Red Deer Advocate in Alberta, worked for The Province newspaper in Vancouver and contributed regularly to Reader’s Digest for eight years. She is now one of the few women publishers and owners of an independent, community newspaper in Canada.

“My husband thought it was more of a gamble than I did, but I believed in the product and we had enough money to enable me to take that chance for the first two years.”

She attributes the success of the newspaper to its strong identification with the readers and the community, as well as the quality of the product.

“The paper has first-rate writers and photographers, lots of colour photographs and we cover everything from the

courts and local politics to interviewing old-timers about what it used to be like in the area,” says Elinor.

The paper started out at 16 pages but has grown to 72 on long weekends. “We also publish several annual publications including a dining guide, a map book and a homes magazine,” she says. “We’ve turned into an actual publishing company.” Some of the changes brought on by running a successful company have been easier than others. “As a publisher you have a very high profile in the community and I’m not always comfortable with that.” Still, she says, “I am doing something I love at a time when most of my former colleagues are thinking about retiring.”

Elinor credits her farming parents with her strong work ethic. Her mother taught her that women can do anything that men can. “My mother called herself a farmer, never a farmer’s wife,” she says. “She always said she was just as much a farmer as my father was.”

*“Make sure you have the start-up capital. You have to be able to hang in there for a couple of years.”*

# Maya Huppie

RIVERBEND EQUESTRIAN CENTRE  
3042 WYCLIFFE STORE ROAD, CRANBROOK, BC  
250.427.5403

Maya Huppie took the old adage of getting back in the saddle to heart when she was thrown from a horse herself. When a riding accident left her confined to a wheelchair, Maya chose to get right back up, figuratively, and use the mishap as an opportunity to change her life and become self-employed.

Neither she, nor her husband Brian, had any business experience or financial resources. They researched their options and found assistance with government programs. After a year in the programs, they re-mortgaged their house and launched Riverbend Equestrian Centre, a heated, indoor training facility. Maya is owner/operator.

Riverbend provides programs for competitive riders, specializing in hunters and jumpers. Maya travels regularly to keep her coaching practices up to date. "Our students do exceptionally well against riders all over Canada and the USA," she says. "They consistently rank in the top three."

"When we first opened the business we opened it to all riding disciplines," says Maya. "Now we've narrowed it down to hunters and jumpers. Having all types of riders wasn't a good mix. By specializing we have a better focus on the actual training instead of the logistics of scheduling."

Launching a business like Riverbend in a sparsely

populated area, from a wheelchair, wasn't optimal, but Maya says, "Starting a business has been the very best thing for me. If you think you should, just go out and do it."

"Look at market needs, especially in your specific area," she suggests. "Anyone who does their research and has the energy and desire will succeed as long as they keep their eyes on the goal."

Maya and Brian have paid off almost all of their loans and the business is self-sustaining. "We may not make a whack of money but we enjoy our life and we make enough to be comfortable."

Maya says the business has given her a purpose. "It's brought me a lot closer to my husband and gives us a lot of time together," she says. "We've beaten the odds there. I may be in a wheelchair but our relationship is really strong, happy and healthy."

*"I can now set my own hours, my own rules and regulations and my own standards as to how things run."*



“I amaze myself at what I  
can accomplish from  
a wheelchair.  
Clear communication is  
the key”



## Gina Ironmonger

KEYSTONE APPRAISALS INC.  
201 1328 BAY AVENUE, TRAIL, BC  
250.368.6855 | [www.keystoneappraisals.ca](http://www.keystoneappraisals.ca)

Gina Ironmonger says she's always had an entrepreneurial spirit so when she got married and moved to Trail, she decided to go into business for herself.

Gina had been in real estate sales in the Okanagan and went back to college for some upgrading before working for BC Assessment in northwest BC where she managed a team from the Queen Charlottes to Alberta and from Prince George to the Yukon.

The idea for a business occurred to her in January 2006, she married in March and Keystone Appraisals was open for business that May. "I had no idea what I wanted the business to be when I started. I thought I'd be working off the corner of a desk and doing the occasional job from there," Gina says.

Once the business was off the ground, success came quickly. "It just took off and it got so busy I've had to open up offices in Trail, Nelson and Grand Forks. Now my challenge isn't finding work, it is finding people who are willing to relocate and work here for me," she says. "One thing that entrepreneurs have to learn is to let go. I was afraid to turn down any business; now I realize I can be more selective."

Gina says she looks for ways to offer better service to her clients: mainly financial institutions. "One of the things none of our competitors provide is on-line ordering," she says. "They can download and upload info and keep track of everything they've done with us. It saves time and money and is a super communication tool."

Gina's mother has been a great role model. "My mother was always independent and strong," she says. "She always had businesses that allowed her to still keep close with the family. At the same time she was very flexible. Dad was in construction so we moved around a lot and she would start up a new business in the new home."

*"I had no idea what I wanted the business to be when I started. I thought I'd be working off the corner of a desk and doing the occasional job from there."*

“Focus on the market/  
clientele you want and then  
engage in it.

It's much easier to focus in  
on a niche market and  
expand from there”

# Karen LeMoel

BOURBON STREET BOUTIQUE  
646 18TH STREET, CASTLEGAR, BC  
250.365.2663 | [www.bourbonstreet.ca](http://www.bourbonstreet.ca)

Karen thought she could walk into the high-end ladies wear business in a small interior city of 5,000, do what needed to be done and everything would work out. It took her six years to realize she couldn't do it all on her own.

"In order to sustain this business, you need to have an excellent support system in place. This not only means family and friends, but it is crucial to have business associates and business coaches behind you," acknowledges Karen.

Karen is a fine example of focused marketing in action. In a small city with a limited customer base, she had to provide something that was more than just clothing. "I make sure that my exceptional customer service is extended to absolutely everyone who walks through my door. Now in general terms, 80 per cent of your revenue will come from the top 20 per cent of your customers. I make sure that I know my top 20 per cent very well. When you get to know a person it doesn't take long to know what they like and how they like to buy," she says. "I listen to my customers."

Remembering her customers' styles and buying habits is a lot easier to do with a database of profiles Karen has

collected: "When I go to market, I take my customers' preferences with me. Then I can really concentrate on what merchandise to purchase for them. When it arrives, I call my customers to tell them that I ordered something that might just be perfect!" This attention to detail helps keep inventory costs down as well.

She has developed many mail-order customers, some of whom have never been in the store. For them, Karen provides a complimentary telephone style analysis and based on this, she can put together a clothing and accessories package tailor-made for their style. "So far, the only returns have been lots of thank you's," she says.

Besides the fact that she knows her clientele so well, it's also the fun, lively atmosphere that Karen offers in her shop that keeps her customers returning. Soft jazz music and an ambiance reminiscent of New Orleans greet customers. "I make the occasion of trying on clothes fun!"

*"Above all, invest in yourself!  
It's the best investment you will ever make!"*



“I look for inspiration  
to keep my passion alive and  
I love to inspire others  
to theirs”



“It’s not a case of wanting to do it – you have to believe you can do it”

## Denise Pallesen

NUTTERS BULK AND NATURAL FOODS  
1107 BAKER STREET, CRANBROOK, BC  
1.888.426.5519 | [www.nutters.com](http://www.nutters.com)

Perseverance, determination and a strong belief in herself were the keys to Denise Pallesen starting her own business and they remain a factor in her success almost a decade later.

Always interested in being self-employed, Denise didn’t let the fact that she had no retail background stop her from seizing the opportunity when a bankrupt local health store franchise became available in Cranbrook in March 1997.

“As a female entrepreneur it was tough,” she says. She convinced the bank to finance her business by putting her house up as collateral.

When Denise took over the Nutters franchise, her vision was just to make it through year one. The store has been in the same location since start-up and carries a complete supply of vitamins, supplements, pre-packaged organic, celiac and other specialty foods.

Denise says it has been a roller coaster ride with her third year in business particularly difficult. “I didn’t think we’d make it. After year three things really picked up. I was so fortunate to have amazing staff. Year four was good and

year five was hard again. Since year seven things have been going great.”

“We’ve taken the deli out of the store and expanded to having the best selection of celiac foods in the East Kootenays,” she says. “Our vitamin and supplement section is much larger than it was before.”

What sets Nutters apart from the average health food store, says Denise, is the knowledge and expertise of its employees. “The staff is always training on new products whether it’s teleconferencing or reps coming in.”

A very aggressive marketing approach, where she advertises continually in newspapers, flyers and on the radio, has also helped. “We had lots of competition that had been around for years and I actually had a new store come into town and tell me they were going to run me out of business,” she laughs. “They’re gone and I’m still here.”

*“If you think you can – then you can. You have to believe in yourself. If you don’t, you will never be successful.”*

# Brenda Palmer

MRS. PALMER'S PANTRY  
236 SLATER ROAD, CRANBROOK, BC  
250.426.1151 | [www.mrspalmerspantry.com](http://www.mrspalmerspantry.com)

Adversity is the mother of invention they say and Brenda Palmer faced plenty of adversity when she decided to reinvent herself and make a better life for her children.

In 1995, Brenda, a Metis woman, had just had her fourth child and was in a highly dysfunctional marriage. She left the marriage and started a new life investing everything she had into her small company, Mrs. Palmer's Pantry.

She ran her business part time for about seven years. "Then I decided it was time to go big or go home," she says. In the beginning, she made pepper jellies and antipastos, but now she is almost entirely focused on pita chip snacks. "The pita chips have taken over the business," she says.

Mrs. Palmer's Pantry pita chips are oven-baked with zero trans fat, all natural ingredients and no additives. "Our chips are different because we make each pita individually," says Brenda. "Other pita chip makers just use broken up baked pitas." Brenda's tenacity has paid off as her company's pita chip snacks have just been approved as "healthy snacks" for sale in Canadian schools. "Getting them approved for sales in schools makes a positive statement of how we are helping our

nation grow healthier kids," she says. She also ships her pita chips as far as Hong Kong and they are available at Disney World in Florida.

Brenda says she was strongly influenced by her mom. "My mother never worked out of the home but she was very committed and loyal to what it was she was doing," she says. "That inspired me to make a good home life for my family."

"I've had a lot of blessings in my life and I now am able to go out and speak to people about what I've done and how I've done it," she says. "If I can motivate just one woman to change her own life and improve it then I've given back some of my blessings."

Brenda says she has an 'absolutely amazing' spouse now and her children know they can accomplish anything with their lives. "Seeing is believing," she says.

*"Find something you love to do – do it wholeheartedly and stick to your principles as you do it."*



Brenda Sawatsky

“I used to be afraid of my own shadow and now I am able to speak in front of groups and tell my story. I have more confidence and pride in myself.”



“Entrepreneurs are confident, self-motivated risk takers with a high tolerance for dealing with unexpected changes...”

## Cathy Rella

KOOTENAY KNITTING COMPANY LTD.  
2 100 VAN HORNE STREET NORTH, CRANBROOK, BC  
866.426.7040 | [www.kootenayknitting.com](http://www.kootenayknitting.com)

When Cathy Rella started Kootenay Knitting in the mid-1990's, she had no idea her products would be atop the podium on the world stage.

Cathy's business began as a hobby in her home, but as she developed a reputation for high quality knitted toques, the business grew and she moved into a 4,500 square foot facility near downtown Cranbrook. Demand for her products increased and she soon purchased three "state of the art" knitting machines.

Initially, Cathy was involved in all aspects of the design, manufacturing and selling of the knitwear. As the business has grown, these functions have been delegated to others and Cathy's role is to oversee the company. She feels that it is important for a leader to have the ability to create a clear vision, communicate that vision to others and to lead by example.

In 2002, Kootenay Knitting hit the big time when CBC announcers wore its vests and sweaters at the Salt Lake City Olympic Winter Games, significantly increasing their profile. The company was also chosen by the Hudson's Bay Company to supply hats for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino and was selected as a Vancouver 2010 Official

Licensee. Kootenay Knitting has also formed a business relationship with Cross Country Canada and will be supplying aboriginal inspired products to Canada's National Cross Country Team.

In 2007, the company developed a business relationship with Nisga'a Knit & Apparel Corp. "As an official licensee for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, we were inspired by VANOC's commitment to unprecedented aboriginal participation," said Cathy. "In many ways, VANOC's goals helped lead us to this partnership with the Nisga'a."

Cathy advises others interested in turning their hobbies into gold. "Research the marketplace to see if there are any voids and try to fill them," she advises. "Entrepreneurs are confident, self-motivated risk takers, with a high tolerance for dealing with unexpected changes and they require passion, a clear vision and strong mentors. Build a strong team," she says.

*"Create a clear vision, communicate that vision to others and lead by example."*

# Lila Tomlinson

AGRI-GREEN BIODIESEL INC.

SPARWOOD, BC

250.423.7205 | [www.agr-greenbiodiesel.com](http://www.agr-greenbiodiesel.com)

With increasing concerns about the environment and rising gas prices, could the concept of a 'fuel U-brew' really be that far-fetched? Lila Tomlinson didn't think so. Her company, Agri-Green Biodiesel, which produces and distributes biodiesel fuel, has recently opened a U-brew that will teach people how to make their own.

Lila first thought about making biodiesel in late 2002. Her young son had allergies and she and her husband Gary had been told to get rid of their old carpets. They took a closer look at all the other allergens and contaminants that could be lurking in their home and in their immediate environment and decided to make some changes.

"We've been made more aware of what we are doing to our environment," she says.

"We've always driven diesel," she says and became interested in biodiesel as a healthier alternative. But the nearest manufacturer of biodiesel was in Saskatchewan and the nearest distributor was in Vancouver, so they began making it at home. They soon realized making small batches was not economically feasible, so they incorporated in early 2005 and opened up a shop in late 2006.

Lila, who has an accounting designation and a strong concern for the environment, says she has also learned a lot about how provincial and federal governments are helping — and how they're lacking — with regard to environmental matters. "It's more lucrative being a manufacturer in the States. Being in Canada, it is cheaper to be a distributor," she says.

Lila gets her entrepreneurial inspiration from her mother who raised a family and worked outside the home. "Family was always first with her," she says, "keeping the family unit intact no matter what. An entrepreneur is someone who sees possibilities where others don't and is willing to do something with their beliefs and to act on them," she says.

Lila also credits Sasha Galt, who spoke at a Women's Enterprise Centre workshop in Cranbrook, with some useful advice: "Make sure you have lots of room on your credit cards because you're going to need it."

*"We've been made more aware of what we are doing to our environment."*



Vanessa Croome, Clarismedia

“Don't do something unless you are in love with it because it will become your world. You dream about it, talk about it, live it ...”



“You can’t control the tourism traffic, so you need to depend on the locals for the base of your business”

## Lindsay Wong

GYPSY AT RED MOUNTAIN RESTAURANT  
4430 RED MOUNTAIN ROAD, ROSSLAND, BC  
250.362.3347 | [www.gypsyatred.com](http://www.gypsyatred.com)

Living a quiet life where she could raise her family is what drew Lindsay Wong and her husband to Rossland in 1995. Although she served as a city councillor and President of the Rossland Chamber of Commerce, it was her previous experience in the service and hospitality sector that prompted her to buy a local restaurant two years later. “It seemed like the right thing to do at the time,” she says. Three months later, The Mountain Gypsy Café was open for business in downtown Rossland. At that time there was only one other similar restaurant in the town, with a permanent population of 3,200 people.

Two years later, in 1997, The Mountain Gypsy permanently became Gypsy at Red, with its newer, better location at the ski hill. “Although we are in a touristy area, we’ve based our business on the locals and cater to their wants, needs and desires,” says Lindsay. “You can’t control the tourism traffic, so you need to depend on the locals for the base of your business.”

Initially, she had planned to vary the menu often, offering variety with seasonal foods and ingredients. “What we’ve learned is that people actually like familiarity,” Lindsay says. “They come in and ask for their favourite salad,

sauce or dessert. We still change the menu twice a year, but we make sure we keep familiar items on the menu at all times.”

She keeps the hours consistent, too. “We try to be open seven nights a week,” she says. “We only take Christmas day off. The cooking is the biggest challenge but we are very fortunate to have talented and qualified people working for us.”

When her husband passed away, not having him to bounce ideas off of was difficult. “Now it’s just me,” she said. But it’s her pioneering spirit that gets her through.

“The hardest thing about being in business is the human resource aspect,” says Lindsay, who believes a leader is someone who doesn’t concern themselves with being ‘the leader,’ but leads by instilling in others the ability to want to do things.

*“Business is a challenge and you have to be ready for everything that can affect your business and be able to weather the storms.”*



# Thompson Okanagan

Benson, Donna .....	42	Linklater, Alison .....	50
Brown, Esther .....	43	McCallum, Lesley.....	51
Cham, Lisa .....	44	Melcosky, Ellen .....	52
Dawson, Jude.....	45	Mick, Suzanne .....	47
Denison, Donna .....	46	Moore, Tammy.....	53
Finley, Jennifer .....	54	Murphy, Karen .....	54
Gray, Tracy.....	47	Peters, Zu.....	55
Johnston, Barbra.....	48	Pont, Lynn .....	56
Leroux, Deb.....	49	Stark, Vera .....	57
		Zacharias, Melody .....	58



## Donna Benson

PCT NETWORKS INC.  
3 626 MAIN STREET, PENTICTON, BC  
250.493.7286 | [www.healthresearch.ca](http://www.healthresearch.ca)

“You have to identify what your definition of success is – whether it is reaching a certain financial goal or something else”

When Donna Benson retired from a successful career in the pharmaceutical industry, she moved to the Okanagan. But instead of taking up golf, she embraced the challenge of entrepreneurship by starting PCT Networks, the first private Okanagan-based organization totally dedicated to clinical research.

Donna moved to the Okanagan in 1991 when her husband accepted a career position in Naramata. Although she had retired, she soon found herself looking for something she could sink her teeth into. She realized her background could be applied to the clinical trials industry and decided the best way to do the work she wanted to do was to start her own company.

Her vision — “To create a network of sites conducting the best clinical research in Western Canada” — was only part of her challenge. After many years working for someone else, running her own company required a different set of skills and a different perspective on her work. “You have to identify what your definition of success is – whether it is reaching a certain financial goal, or something else. For me, success is partially about bringing research dollars into the Okanagan, but

more importantly, contributing to health care solutions for patients here and around the world and creating meaningful and worthwhile work for the talented people we have in the Okanagan.”

“Having a mentor is essential,” she adds, crediting Christine Pierre, founder of RxTrials out of Virginia who began her career as an intensive care nurse, as being a major inspiration for her. Donna also took advantage of the mentoring programs offered by Community Futures.

“It’s also critical to put the right people in the right positions in your business. I’ve learned to look for people who are proactive, take responsibility and are totally in sync with the objectives of the company.”

Much like medical research which is constantly yielding new information, Donna and her business are continually evolving. “My greatest appreciation is being able to create an environment in which others can further develop personally and professionally by serving their patients and contributing to the broader community,” she says.

*“Having a mentor is essential.”*

# Esther Brown

HANDWORKS GALLERY

BOX 271, OLIVER, BC

250.498.6388 | [www.handworksgallery.ca](http://www.handworksgallery.ca)

It was “a delayed adolescence” that motivated Esther Brown to start working on cruise ships at age 50 as a gift store manager. When she returned to Vancouver and settled into a job at the Canadian Craft Museum, her appetite for working in the retail/gallery environment had been whetted. Following a series of serendipitous events that took her from international traveler to small town entrepreneur, Esther decided to open a first-of-its-kind outlet, Handworks Gallery, in Oliver.

“My parents were in Osoyoos which is not far from Oliver and I was looking forward to putting down roots in a smaller community,” Esther says. “When I spoke with the economic development people there, I liked the planning that was in place to make the area a resort destination while preserving the agricultural history of the area. My original idea was to work as an artists’ agent, but once I did my research, I could see the potential for a retail gallery and changed by business plan.”

When an old church in downtown Oliver became available, Esther gave it a “little cosmetic surgery” and opened her doors in 2004. From her extensive network of contacts, she invited award-winning BC artists to be

part of the Handworks Gallery experience by providing unique pottery, glass, textiles, jewelry, photography and paintings.

She moved into a larger location on the main street in late 2007. “The rent was more but it had a high profile location that really worked for a gallery atmosphere,” Esther says. “I believed in what I was doing and the growth that was planned for the community. Now both locals and returning tourists are seeking us out, which to me is a valuable gauge of our success.”

“I’ve learned that a business plan, while important, is one thing on paper but you have to be prepared to adapt your plan to the real world. You mustn’t be afraid to step off the edge or you’ll never know what’s out there for you,” she says. “It’s taken me most my life to learn to trust my instincts.”

*“I’m still struggling in some ways, but I believe in this community and what I am doing.”*



“I love this community as well as the interaction with artists. It all comes together in the gallery”



## Lisa Cham

THE FIXX CAFÉ AND PASTA BAR  
 101 3275 LAKESHORE ROAD, KELOWNA, BC  
 250.861.3499

“You really need to find your niche. If you don’t, you’ll find you lose your passion as time goes on”

In the 1980’s, after more than seven years experience as a waitress, some management training and a course on how to run a small business, Lisa opened her first restaurant, the Allegro Café in downtown Vancouver. It was there she learned her most important business lesson. “I thought I could do it all myself. It made me miserable and I ended up selling.”

Lisa then lived in the Caribbean for 10 years, owning a restaurant but due to a dramatic change in her personal circumstances, she left everything behind and returned to Canada with only her handbag. Curiosity brought her to Kelowna, a city she had never visited and where she knew no one. She went for coffee at the Fixx Café, told the restaurant owner she had owned restaurants. “He jokingly suggested I should buy the restaurant, so I did,” says Lisa. With a loan from Women’s Enterprise Centre and a solid business plan, Lisa opened the new Fixx Café in January 2005.

Initially, it was a challenge to find and train the right staff. She had advertised for a chef and the ad wasn’t answered in time for opening, which put her in charge of the kitchen.

She still does all of the cooking, but she gets out on the floor, too. “I learn people’s names and try to make an effort to talk and get to know my customers,” says Lisa. Experience is important, but Lisa believes that it is only part of what it takes to be a success. Entrepreneurs should be prepared to work hard in a business they know and love. “You also need to find out where you fit in the community, in which capacity you can serve,” she says. “Learn how other people in your industry do it and then modify it to suit your plan. Don’t be afraid to try new things on your own.”

The Fixx is thriving, but Lisa has no plans to expand. “I am now in love with it,” she says. “I have no social life and that’s okay because right now, at this time, it’s all I need.”

*“I thought I could do it all myself. It made me miserable and I ended up selling.”*

# Jude Dawson

SHUSWAP HOMEOPATHY CLINIC  
BOX 368, SALMON ARM, BC  
250.804.0104

With her training as a classical homeopath and a dream of owning her own practice, Jude Dawson immigrated to Canada from the UK with her husband in 1993. She found the demand for alternative healing practices was strong and in 1999, she opened the Shuswap Homeopathy Clinic in Salmon Arm.

Jude's services were relatively unique in this rural community and the business grew quickly. Nine years down the road, she is as passionate about her business as she was at the start, inspired by her patients themselves. Personalized, one-on-one care is the foundation of Jude's reputation and a big reason for her repeat business. "I make my patients feel listened to and cared for and I help them to make the changes they need for healthier living," she says.

Detailed patient records are logged in a database which Jude uses to track both the course of treatment for patients and their progress and general trends that can be used in future marketing. "I noticed that in the last four years, for example, many of my patients were losing weight in the course of being treated for other issues, all aimed at a healthier lifestyle," Jude says. "So the potential

for weight loss is an additional benefit we can include in our marketing."

Jude also serves as a Supervisor for the Vancouver Homeopathic Academy and teaches fourth-year students how to set up a successful practice. Constantly upgrading her training is important to Jude and she makes time for professional development, even though time away from the office means less income. "You have to 'walk the talk'. In any kind of caring profession you have to be strong and healthy both mentally and physically so that you can continue to give to your patients," she says.

With the recent move to a larger office space which she shares with another alternative practitioner, Jude hopes to be able to give back to the community more. "My father used to say that one's ultimate goal should be to help as many people as possible," Jude says. "I am passionate about my work and honoured to be able to help people on their path to wellness."

*"You have to 'walk the talk'. In any kind of caring profession you have to be strong and healthy so you can continue to give to your patients."*



“One's ultimate goal should be to help as many people as possible”



## Donna Denison

LITTLE CREEK GARDENS  
 3545 WESTSIDE ROAD NORTH, KELOWNA, BC  
 250.769.3932 | [www.littlecreekgardens.com](http://www.littlecreekgardens.com)

Although friends and family raved about Donna Denison’s home-made salad dressings for years, she had never considered selling them commercially. But her desire to work from home when her twin daughters were born and contribute to the family farm, spurred her to take the leap into entrepreneurship.

Donna and her husband Dale moved to “Little Creek” — land on the west side of Okanagan Lake that had been in the Denison family for 60 years — shortly before their twins were born. Around the same time, the government began encouraging anyone involved in agriculture to create “value-added” products. Donna began bottling her dressing as a complement to the organic mixed greens Dale grew on the farm.

“I’m not a big risk taker and I’m pretty thrifty, so we worked at the business slowly but surely,” Donna says. A common-sense approach to business development prevailed over a formal business plan for many years. But with incredible support from friends and family — especially Donna’s father who was her ‘Chief Bottler, Labeler and Garlic Peeler’ — the products began to catch on.

Today, three flavours of Little Creek dressings — Original, Spicy Strawberry and Cherry Balsamic — are available in grocery, produce and health food stores throughout the Okanagan, Kootenays, BC’s Lower Mainland and parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario. With endorsements from such critics as Chatelaine magazine’s food editor who described Little Creek’s Original Dressing as “the best bottled dressing I’ve ever had,” Donna’s dressings have become so popular, the company’s website proclaims that, “Many customers have confessed to ‘swigging’ the dressing right from the bottle.”

More than two decades have passed since Donna started her business. Now 22, twins Kerisa and Amber are interested in playing a hands-on role in its operation. Work is being done on a new strategic plan and new products are being created as well.

Donna says, “I am now ready to expand my business and I am thrilled that my daughters are joining me in creating healthy, nutritious and delicious foods!”

*“We worked at the business slowly but surely.”*

“I’ve been able to earn a living and work from the farm supporting my family and the agriculture industry all these years, thanks to the support of those around me.”

# Tracy Gray & Suzanne Mick

DISCOVER WINES

2080C SPRINGFIELD ROAD, KELOWNA, BC

250.868.3990 | [www.discoverwines.com](http://www.discoverwines.com)

With wine tourism gaining popularity and the provincial government reducing its involvement in the retail liquor business, Tracy Gray and Suzanne Mick saw a huge opportunity for a first-class wine retailer in Kelowna in 2002.

Both women had worked for several years in the burgeoning BC wine industry and had experience in many areas, with a focus on retail.

Tracy and Suzanne spent a year researching and writing an extensive five-year business plan. “Then we looked for start-up financing,” says Tracy. “After an exhausting and demoralizing process with lending institutions, we were welcomed with open arms by Women’s Enterprise Centre. They have remained our number one supporters.”

During Discover Wines’ opening month, disaster struck the Okanagan: forest fires raged, destroying homes and property, filling the valley with smoke. The tourism industry was hit hard, but eventually bounced back. In the interim, the government was reconsidering its decision to close most of its liquor stores.

“Being in a highly regulated industry has presented many challenges for us,” say Tracy and Suzanne. Still, there has been much to celebrate. Among their successes, the

two include beating out hundreds of other applicants from around the province to acquire this specialized wine retail license; winning the Business Excellence Award in Kelowna and the 2006 RBC Canadian Woman Entrepreneur Award; paying off their business loan on their fifth anniversary as planned; and a successful evolution to closing Sundays.

Tracy and Suzanne think entrepreneurs are visionaries that make ideas and dreams happen, they don’t just talk about them. “You need to be incredibly self-motivated and driven to be an entrepreneur,” they say.

Having both been self-employed prior to this business, Tracy and Suzanne thought they knew what to expect. “But being a self-employed home-based business versus a limited corporation with staff and an off site location to manage, are worlds apart,” says Suzanne. “The level of commitment and responsibility is exponentially greater.”

*“We believe in building a strong, healthy, happy team. Without our team, there is no business. Without leadership, there is no team. All components are essential.”*



“After an exhausting and demoralizing process with lending institutions, we were welcomed with open arms by Women’s Enterprise Centre





“Believe in your dream,  
filter through all the advice  
you receive and trust your  
instincts”

## Barbra Johnston

NATURES FORMULAE HEALTH PRODUCTS LTD.  
300 2130 LECKIE PLACE, KELOWNA, BC  
250.717.5700 | [www.naturesformulae.com](http://www.naturesformulae.com)

Barbra Johnston’s affinity for a healthy lifestyle has led her to develop a formula for a successful business and personal life.

What began as an effort to help a friend making herbal tinctures has evolved into a successful business that employs over 50 employees. Barbra bought her friend’s business in 1991 thinking it would provide a decent living for herself. Today she and Natures Formulae Health Products Ltd. are well on their way to achieving quite a different vision: to be a leader in the natural cosmetics, supplements and herbal extract components industry.

Barbra saw the need for high quality tinctures by naturopathic doctors as well as health food stores wishing for private label products. Word soon got around about the exacting standards to which her products were made and over the years she has moved five times to accommodate her growing business. Natures Formulae now produces approximately 4,800 products: many Natural Health Products Directorate approved herbal extracts, cosmetics and berry-based nutritional drinks.

“We are much more automated in our processes today, but we still keep our small start-up customers in mind by

providing high quality products at a price and quantity they can afford,” Barbra says.

“The greatest challenge in growing the business has been getting others to believe in my vision, even though awareness of the value of natural products has grown exponentially. BDC and Community Futures were among the first to invest in the company’s growth and development. This taught me that you have to really believe in your dream, filter through all the advice you receive and trust your instincts.”

Natures Formulae’s head office has always been in Kelowna, even though Barbra was told she would have to be in a bigger city to be successful. Being in the lifestyle-oriented Okanagan is a good fit for a health products company and has enabled it to develop partnerships with local academic and scientific organizations. “There’s a little more freight to deal with, but this is home,” Barbra says.

*“The greatest challenge in growing the business has been getting others to believe in my vision.”*

# Deb Leroux

HARRIS FLOWERS

3118 30TH AVENUE, VERNON, BC  
250.545.0379 | [www.harrisflowers.com](http://www.harrisflowers.com)

A passion for flowers and an inherent business sense came together for Deb Leroux when she purchased the venerable Harris Flowers in Vernon in 2005. The Lumby councillor knew she eventually wanted to own her own company and once she took it on she was quick to build on the business' 70-year history and distinguish herself from the competition.

When the opportunity presented itself, her first reaction was, "I don't have time to own a business, I want to be the mayor," said Deb. Now she says, "What I learned in politics helps with business and what I've learned in business helps with politics."

Deb loves the creative outlet of working with flowers. "Flowers are a physical expression of many emotions," she points out, "whether they say, 'Congratulations', 'I'm sorry for your loss,' 'Thank you,' or 'I love you,' we help determine the impact the flowers will have and that's a responsibility we take very seriously."

For Deb, it's all about service. Exceptional service is the driving force behind Harris Flowers. "Whether a customer is using the company for the first or 100th time, we try to tell them how much we value their business," Deb

says. A database is used to track regular gifting and Deb will help them plan their gift. Random calls are equally valuable, she says. "We ask our customers if the flowers achieved the experience or feeling they had in mind." One of her business coach's gems of advice is, "If you listen carefully enough, your customers will explain your business to you. But, you have to ask."

Deb continues to take advantage of the resources available to her as a woman entrepreneur. She lives her motto: "Lift, as you climb" by supporting other women entrepreneurs and the Vernon Women in Business. She is able to balance her time between family, politics and business and still be a steward and an ambassador for her community and industry.

*"What I learned in politics helps with business and what I've learned in business helps with politics."*



Brenda Hala Photography

“If you listen carefully enough, your customers will explain your business to you ...”



## Alison Linklater

WESTWOLD CARROT COMPANY  
WESTWOLD, BC  
250.375.2324

Back when Alison Linklater's farm was mainly a sales outlet that facilitated her passion for gardening, she jokingly called it the 'Westwold Carrot Company'. This tongue-in-cheek reference to the Douglas Lake Cattle Company, the largest privately held cattle ranch in Canada and her neighbour 'up the road', became the company's formal name when Alison implemented her vision of bringing together entrepreneurs of hand-made products and goods 12 years ago.

Those who know Alison often describe her as 'inspirational' and when it comes to getting others into business, she lives up to that reputation. There are 40 entrepreneurs, mainly women, who display their goods and products at the Westwold Carrot Company store. "The original goal was to promote strictly local but the vendor pool kept expanding as word spread," Alison says. From June to Thanksgiving, the on-site produce and craft shop sells everything from produce, pickles and preserves to pottery, glassware, quilting, organic coffee and tea and even birch tree syrup. All the products are made within the borders of BC.

Visitors driving along Highway 97 between Vernon and

Kamloops often make a point of stopping at the farm to see Alison and her husband Ron Nadeau, who owns Evergreen Turf Farm. Both enjoy making time for their guests despite the demands of operating two businesses. "The greatest challenge has been managing the growth," Alison concedes. "As the number of products has increased, so has the number of visitors and we are constantly adding to our retail space while seeking out new and innovative products."

"When we started this, I knew it would be interesting, entertaining and frustrating and it has been all of that," Alison says. "What I wasn't prepared for was success. I've learned that you have to build alliances, trust in the knowledge of your staff and learn from their experiences, listen to their stories and share that information with others."

*"The greatest challenge has been managing our growth."*

“I knew it would be interesting, entertaining and frustrating . . . what I wasn't prepared for was success”

# Lesley McCallum

ARTISTIC LIGHTING DESIGN

KELOWNA, BC

250.864.5483 | [www.artisticlightingdesign.com](http://www.artisticlightingdesign.com)

Lesley McCallum is combining her skills in the trades with her background in art to “paint the night with light.” Lesley, owner of Artistic Lighting Design, is a journeyman electrician, who accentuates the beautiful and hides the not so beautiful with the use of landscape lighting.

She began her landscape lighting design company in 2004 and uses all her talents to help people enjoy their outside space day and night. She says she loves the feelings she can invoke with well-placed lights in people’s yards in every season and she sees herself as an artist who uses light and shadow as paintbrushes upon the darkness of night.

“I always go back to the home after the installation is complete to make sure the lights are placed exactly right,” she says. With her electrical background, she is able to design a well-balanced system for future additions which also takes into account plant growth and seasonal changes and she designs her blueprints to leave room for expansion in years to come.

“In 2004, my vision for the business was that I’d be working on smaller residential homes and on a smaller scale,” says Lesley. However Lesley quickly discovered her

business was on the cusp of the trend where homeowners were renovating backyards to make dramatic outdoor living spaces, complete with appropriate lighting. As a result she is now “drawn into larger and more unique projects than expected. I now do everything from large homes, to estates and even rooftop gardens and restaurants.”

“I love what I do,” she says. “Despite the long hours and hard work, I’m really happy now. I have the control to directly influence my future.”

*“My whole family has a really good work ethic and I learned from them how to manipulate my environment. If something doesn’t work, I make it work.”*



Yuri Akunev

“Overall, despite the chance of failure, I will attempt many things that others will not. Some call it bull-headedness – I call it sheer determination”



“Banks still wouldn’t look at me because I was a First Nations woman and had no equity”

## Ellen Melcosky

LITTLE MISS CHIEF GOURMET PRODUCTS INC.  
WESTBANK, BC  
250.768.6977 | [www.littlemisschief.com](http://www.littlemisschief.com)

Unlike many entrepreneurs, raising money to start her venture wasn’t a problem for Ellen Melcosky, owner of Little Miss Chief Gourmet Products, Inc. “I had money coming in before I even had the product ready,” she says. “Banks still wouldn’t look at me because I was a First Nations woman and had no equity.”

Ellen started her business in 1994 after raising her family. Her friends encouraged her to go into business so she decided to produce smoked salmon using all natural ingredients and the methods she learned from her mother, a hunter skilled in food preservation.

“My vision was to break into the local market in the Okanagan,” she says, but she didn’t want her business to grow too quickly. She got a loan from Women’s Enterprise Centre and sold \$200K in the first year. Her products are now sold across Canada and around the world.

Ellen was the first First Nations woman to develop such a business in the Okanagan. She is also the first smoked salmon producer to use Okanagan white wine in her marinades.

“I used to be such a shy person and never thought I’d be

able to speak to people like I do now,” she says. “I found out I had to get out there if I was going to succeed.”

The first time she was invited to be on television, she was worried sick. “Then it started and I was fine and now I’ve been on a lot of TV shows around Canada.”

Ellen believes an entrepreneur must be willing to work long hours, continually update her business plan and understand her current market while pursuing new ones.

“Be proud of who you are and give back to the world what you’ve received,” she says. “Mother Earth has given us so much.”

*“Listen to your elders; they have something to teach you.  
And never give up on your dream.”*

# Tammy Moore

MADHOUSE CREATIVE INC.  
202 1353 ELLIS STREET, KELOWNA, BC  
250.860.8651 | [www.madhousecreative.com](http://www.madhousecreative.com)



Opportunity is often disguised as adversity, as was the case for Tammy Moore. When the advertising agency Tammy was working for fell into financial hardship, it taught her two things: first, it was an excellent lesson for what not to do in business; and second, it became obvious that a regular paycheque wasn't a given just because you were working for someone else.

Out of the desire to create her own security, Tammy started Moore and Associates Advertising and Design in 1993, providing graphic design services to a broad range of clients. As the clients and their requirements grew, so did the company, and the name was changed to Madhouse Creative.

From the beginning, Madhouse Creative has always sought a seat at the client's boardroom table. "When we establish ourselves as a trusted business advisor, we are able to fully understand the communication objectives and then develop appropriate solutions to respond to these goals." Tammy says Madhouse Creative's originality and strategic solutions have continued to set them apart from other firms. "Our response rate is higher than most companies'. For example we did a call-to-action direct mail program for a government agency

and due to its originality and execution we received a 92 per cent response rate; the industry average is 4 per cent. This program also went on to win awards for our client in their industry-wide, North American competition."

Today Madhouse works with a diverse portfolio of clients throughout Canada. The service offering has expanded to include a full suite of branding and advertising strategies fulfilled through creative design executions, web development and media buys.

Her advice for budding entrepreneurs: "Treat your business, big or small, as a company, even from the earliest stages. If you are starting out from your home, make sure you get a separate business phone number. This separation is critical to business success: it allows you to understand the needs of your business, it also provides the ground work for a healthy work-life balance. Taking your business seriously and treating it with respect will establish how you expect your clients and prospects to view it and will help you secure financing and professional services.

*"Our approach to business is based on a professional partnership — we want a seat at the boardroom table."*

“Treat your business, big or small, as a company, even from the earliest stages”



“I really didn’t have a clue what running a business was all about. But if you don’t take that step, you’ll never know”

## Karen Murphy/Jennifer Finley

EXPRESS GIFT BASKETS LTD. | COOKIE EXPRESS LTD.

1160 HIGH ROAD, KELOWNA, BC

250.763.7445 | [www.expressgiftbaskets.net](http://www.expressgiftbaskets.net) | [www.cookieexpress.ca](http://www.cookieexpress.ca)

When Karen Murphy went to the US as a travel agent she noticed a new type of business taking off - corporate gift baskets. Recognizing a huge opportunity, (since nothing like it existed in the Okanagan), Karen opened Kelowna-based Express Gift Baskets nearly a decade ago. The award-winning company now ships thousands of gift baskets to mainly corporate clients in Canada and the US every year.

Like a good cook who tweaks her recipes, Karen thought of a way to improve upon her product. “I saw an opportunity to add a complementary business with the right person to help me do it,” Karen says. In stepped Jennifer Finley, Karen’s friend and co-worker from the travel business.

“Jen and I talked about it for a long time and then she basically came and hung out with me in an administrative role before she formally came on board as a partner.”

Canadian Cookie Express was created as a division of Express Gift Baskets in 2006, producing five flavours of cookies baked fresh every morning with guaranteed overnight shipment anywhere in Canada. The pair clearly share the same work ethic, values and mutual respect.

“One of the things I’ve had to learn is how to be flexible in working with a wide range of people, from our staff and suppliers to our customers,” says Karen. “I enjoy the customer service end and managing the day-to-day activities of both businesses,” says Jen. “We’re always looking at new products at the right price-point and ways to ensure they are delivered fresh.” Their partnership has continued to evolve along with the business, resulting in steady growth year after year.

With numerous products delivered in a wide range of packaging options, the partners rely on their finely tuned website and efficient courier delivery to meet customer expectations.

*“I’ve had to learn how to be flexible in working with a wide range of people, from our staff and suppliers to our customers.”*

# Zu Peters

ZU'S KITCHEN | SPOONSTRUCK CAFÉ AND CATERING  
3018 TUTT STREET, KELOWNA, BC  
250.860.0131 | [www.spoonstruck.com](http://www.spoonstruck.com)

Zu Peters found her passion for food at an early age. “My mother was a very relaxed person in the kitchen,” Zu says. “As a kid I watched her turn things into great dishes. She didn’t mind me eating as she cooked. I got the feeling that a kitchen was a fun, magical place.”

In her native Singapore, she earned a degree in economics and worked in administrative jobs. It wasn’t until she immigrated to Canada and couldn’t find work in her field, that Zu rediscovered her love of all things food.

In 1996, she started Zu’s Kitchen, providing her own exotic spices and sauces to local restaurants. “I had to invest \$25,000,” Zu says. “It was a stretch because we’d just moved here and didn’t have a credit history.”

Before she could open her own café, Zu was invited to run the kitchen at a local restaurant. In 2004, she opened Spoonstruck Café with a partner. Zu became sole owner in 2006.

Spoonstruck Café is open for lunch and early dinner. The menu, posted on their website to let customers know what’s cooking, offers a global cuisine which is healthy, hearty, quick and gourmet, no red meat and includes vegetarian and gluten free dishes. Food is available eat-

in or ready-to-go. New dishes are added to the menu frequently, many using Zu’s signature spices.

Being the owner has its rewards and challenges, says Zu. “The responsibility of owning a business is quite similar to that of having a child. It doesn’t end at a set time every day. I might get a call at 2 a.m. because someone broke into my café. I may not want to get up but I have to,” she says. “On the other hand my life is more exciting. It’s a welcome challenge every day.”

Zu wants to share her passion. “My goal is to be successful not only financially but also to create a workplace where I can encourage my staff to reach their highest potential. We spend so many of our waking hours at work and I feel they are not optimally spent if it’s only about making money to pay our bills,” says Zu.

“I have a dream to take this and franchise and license it so that there can be more neighbourhood cafés like this.” Zu is about to make her dream come true; she expects her franchising and licensing plan will be ready shortly.

*“I want to encourage and support my staff to be the best and most successful people they can be.”*



Kendra Benson at Photography West

“The responsibility of owning a business is quite similar to that of having a child in that the responsibility does not end at a set time every day.”



Elaine Malais

“You gotta be 20 people  
at once...  
that was stressful, I thought”

## Lynn Pont

DENIM PINE PRODUCTS CORP.  
PEACHLAND, BC  
[www.denimpine.com](http://www.denimpine.com)

Even the most brilliant business ideas sometimes get tied up in knots. Lynn Pont discovered how tenacious an entrepreneur has to be soon after she thought of trademarking the words ‘Denim Pine’™ in 2001 for use by value-added wood product manufacturers.

Lynn had worked with wood product manufacturers in northern BC as a marketing rep and she knew how the pine beetle was devastating the entire industry. Small manufacturers were struggling with the new reality that beetles had infested much of the province’s forests and the wood they left behind was considered ruined. Although its yellow hue is marred with gray-blue stains, similar to the colour of denim, the wood is still structurally sound.

In 2002, Lynn formed a non-profit society and gave them the rights to use the name. Then the problems developed: it quickly appeared that the term ‘denim pine’ was going to be the new generic name adopted by the media and general public for beetle-infested wood. If that happened Lynn knew manufacturers wouldn’t pay to license the trademark ‘denim pine’ because it was already in common use.

In addition, she faced some opposition to her trademark from the BC lumber industry and other officials and that made it difficult for her to sell the licenses in BC. Then her webhost went under and she couldn’t access her website to update and make changes for several months.

Lynn pulled back for two years thinking about how to start over. Influenced by her mother, “a very supportive, very insightful woman with very strong intuition,” Pont was not going to wait around for someone to show her what to do, because she knew there was marketing potential for this product.

She realized that there were companies in other parts of North America and the world who were manufacturing products using the pine beetle wood and they were anxious to obtain a license to use her trademarked term ‘denim pine’. Lynn changed her business strategy and revamped her whole plan. Now, she owns the company and is focusing on wood manufacturing companies outside of BC and Canada who use pine beetle infested lumber. Suddenly, she’s on a smooth plane again.

*“It was an opportunity where I could see the future.”*

# Vera Stark

INTERIOR ACADEMY OF HAIR DESIGN & ESTHETICS  
519 VICTORIA STREET, KAMLOOPS, BC  
250.375.2307 | [www.interioracademy.com](http://www.interioracademy.com)

If you build a better mousetrap they'll beat a path to your door. That was Vera Stark's philosophy when she took over a small, private school for hairdressing in Kamloops. She had a vision to "create a 'Wow! Experience' for her students and the public." Twelve years later, her vision is still going strong with the Academy of Hair Design & Esthetics becoming an award-winning facility sought out by students across British Columbia and Alberta.

The 'Wow! Experience' includes courses aimed at exceeding students' expectations and goes beyond the basics of traditional training covering such areas as personal development, stress management, time management, resume writing, effective retail sales and coaching from personal trainers.

Vera had been working at the school for two years when she purchased the business. She found the day-to-day aspects of ownership a whole new experience after working as a stylist for 18 years. "Learning to read financial statements, do comparisons and budgeting were the areas where I did the most learning," she says. "If I had to do it all over again I would really look at where my money was being spent from day one."

As the school's reputation grew, so did the business. An esthetics division was added in 2000 when she purchased the building where the business was located. In 2003, Vera added a wig store.

The school has been recognized by its peers with numerous awards including the BC School of the Year for Esthetics and BC Overall School of the Year for Hair, Esthetics and Nails in 2005 and again in 2006 by the Cosmetology Industry Association of British Columbia.

Over the years, Vera has learned to "systemize" the business so that her staff can "pretty much run things when I'm not there." With more time to look at new business opportunities, Vera says she is considering coaching as yet another way of helping others become confident professionals.

Her advice is to, "make every obstacle an opportunity. Stay focused on your vision and face your fears. Don't let them stop you."

*"My vision was to create a 'Wow! Experience' for students and the public."*



Mitland Samarosa

“Make every obstacle  
an opportunity, stay  
focused on your vision and  
face your fears”



Fine Photography

## Melody Zacharias

APO ENCRYPTION  
KELOWNA, BC  
250.864.2255 | [www.apoencryption.com](http://www.apoencryption.com)

Security is everybody's business these days, according to Melody Zacharias. "There is so much data out there that has to be protected. Whether you're a home-based accountant or a large healthcare institution, you are responsible and must be accountable for any amount of confidential client data you maintain."

That reality convinced Melody to start a software encryption business in 2005. She had no doubts about the need for this type of service or that it would be a success as no other business provided the same level of specialized data encryption in the Okanagan. Plus, her management team brought complementary software development and business expertise to the equation.

The challenge, Melody says, has been educating the marketplace on the value of encryption services and turning that awareness into sales.

"As mainly technically-oriented people, each one of us has had to go outside of our comfort zone knowing that if you don't do the marketing, you don't get the sale," Melody says. "Now we've identified the best ways to reach our target customers with word-of-mouth referrals being the most effective."

Tapping into the US market has actually been less

challenging for APO than marketing to Canadians, due to different privacy regulations and greater awareness of encryption services south of the border. The partners have also taken advantage of the information and resources available through such organizations as the Women's Enterprise Centre and the international business mentoring program provided through the Economic Development Corporation of Vancouver.

The advantages of being a home-based business and being able to be close to her children when they were small have far outweighed the challenges of building an international business, says Melody. "Despite being home-based, we are still able to operate a highly specialized business modeled after the best in the world in terms of scope and expertise. With the connections available from the Okanagan through Kelowna International Airport, we can get to our clients in person when we need to. Meanwhile, I am always close to my family in one of the best places to live in the world."

*"Despite being home-based, we are still able to operate a highly specialized business modeled after the best in the world."*

“As technically-oriented people, each one of us has had to go outside of our comfort zone ... if you don't do the marketing, you don't get the sale”



## Business & Professional Women's Club - Kamloops

719 Seymour Street, Kamloops, BC

[www.bpw.ca](http://www.bpw.ca)

Kamloops BPW was established in 1940 as a member of the Canadian Federation of Business and Women to “improve the status of women in business, industry and the professional world.” Serving the Kamloops area, meetings are held monthly to provide a non-partisan, non-sectarian basis for cooperation. Networking, workshops and mentoring opportunities as well as the annual golf tournament ensure that members discover and develop the skills they need for success. The monthly newsletter provides event details, a “Business Woman of the Year” award and bursaries recognizing outstanding achievement.



## Business & Professional Women - Penticton

268 – 113 – 437 Martin Street, Penticton, BC

[www.bpwcanada.com](http://www.bpwcanada.com)

Created in 1946, the Penticton Chapter of the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs is committed “to provide support for and recognition of business women and to work towards equality of opportunity and economic security for all women.” Meeting on the third Tuesday of each month, members network in a social setting and enjoy an established mentoring program. An educational focus ensures that guest speakers and a diverse range of workshop topics are informative and relevant. A monthly bulletin delivers local news and reports on the activities of the national Federation.



## Enderby Women in Business

PO Box 246, Grindrod, BC

Founded in 1996, Enderby Women in Business is committed to supporting women in the area, whether owners of a business, representatives of businesses or those who work as caregivers. Enderby Women hosts workshops and speaker events and provides opportunities for members to network. With a focus on both education and socializing, meetings are held monthly with members, 90% of whom own a business. Members are profiled both personally and professionally by the association. Recognizing outstanding women, Enderby Women awards a post-secondary scholarship and sponsors a “Woman of the Year” Tea.



## JCI - Okanagan

PO Box 22119 RPO - Capri Centre, Kelowna, BC

[www.jciokanagan.ca](http://www.jciokanagan.ca)

Established in 1995 as a member of Junior Chamber International – Canada, JCI Okanagan is a female only chapter “dedicated to the personal and professional development of its members through involvement in the community.” Meeting monthly, members, aged 18 to 39, enjoy networking, workshops and mentoring as well as various social and charitable events. The Chapter hosts a speaker series, national and regional conferences and distributes a monthly e-newsletter. JCI Okanagan provides young professionals the opportunity to develop leadership skills, social responsibility, entrepreneurship and fellowship to create positive changes in the community.

[www.kwib.cloverpad.org](http://www.kwib.cloverpad.org)

**Kelowna Women in Business**  
PO Box 22076 Capri Centre, Kelowna, BC



Kelowna Women in Business has been providing networking opportunities, inspiration and education to support women in business since 1993. Serving Kelowna, Westbank and the surrounding area, Kelowna Women in Business is inviting to women of all ages. With a membership that includes 78% business owners, alternating lunch and dinner monthly meetings provide opportunities to make strategic alliances and business contacts. In cooperation with the Central Okanagan Bursary Society, Kelowna Women in Business supports local youth by providing annual bursaries for post-secondary students.

**Penticton Women in Business**  
Box 136, 113 437 Martin Street, Penticton, BC



Serving Penticton and the South Okanagan since 2001, Penticton Women in Business assists its members to “establish profitable business relationships through networking, education and information sharing.” Penticton Women in Business offers networking opportunities and workshops in an educational setting. Monthly meetings, scheduled for the second Tuesday of the month, feature a variety of guest speakers. The Network supports young women entrepreneurs with a bursary at Okanagan College for business students. A monthly newsletter, distributed to over 900 women, provides meeting and event details and features a short motivational business story.

[www.shuswapwomeninbusiness.com](http://www.shuswapwomeninbusiness.com)

**Shuswap Women in Business**  
Salmon Arm, BC



Shuswap Women in Business, serving Salmon Arm and the surrounding area, was created in 2004 to provide “a meeting ground to exchange information as well as create opportunities to meet and socialize with other business women.” Offering support and assistance for women in business, monthly luncheon meetings feature guest speakers, networking and serve as a venue for self promotion. Recognizing outstanding women with a student scholarship and a ‘Woman of the Year’ award, members are involved in the community and enjoy reduced rates for events, including the annual trade show and on-line business directory.

[www.vwib.com](http://www.vwib.com)

**Vernon Women in Business**  
PO Box 1572, Vernon, BC



Founded in 1983 and serving Vernon and the surrounding area, Vernon Women in Business seeks to “inspire, educate and motivate women to be the best they can be in their personal and business lives.” Meeting bi-monthly, alternating lunch and evening events, members enjoy guest speakers, networking as well as presentations from featured members. With a focus on networking, member’s profiles are raised through events, the monthly newsletter and an on-line business directory. To recognize outstanding women in the community, Vernon Women hosts an annual ‘Woman of the Year’ Gala and awards two student scholarships.



## Lower Mainland & South Coast

Adams, Sue.....	62	Kopp, LeiLani.....	73
Arankunda, Maria.....	63	Kreykenbohm, Grace.....	74
Bell, Helen.....	64	Mawani, Shelina.....	75
Biggs, Victoria.....	65	McNicol, Tana.....	73
Creelman-Jenkins, Heather.....	66	Nourinejad, Jinous.....	76
Dhanji, Nasim.....	75	O'Brien, Lillian.....	77
Datt, Shushma.....	67	Parker, Nancy.....	78
Davison, Chela.....	68	Quaale, Angie.....	79
Ebrahim, Shehla.....	69	Reilly, Tami.....	80
Gagnon, Susan.....	70	Toube, Anne.....	81
Green, Maria.....	71	Tunner, Angela.....	82
Kallweit Graham, Karen.....	72	Xenis, Marlene.....	83



“True satisfaction comes from lifelong learning...”

## Sue Adams

BEVENDALE ENTERPRISES INC.  
4211 VILLAGE SQUARE, WHISTLER, BC  
604-932-3628 | [www.whistlergrocery.com](http://www.whistlergrocery.com)

For many British Columbians, owning one small business would fulfill a life-long dream. Sue Adams has fulfilled that dream six times over and she is still going strong.

Residents and visitors to the Lower Mainland may be familiar with at least one of the businesses Sue has owned or co-owned since the early 1970's: either from the Pyrogy House which she managed in New Westminster to the Amorous Oyster and Contented Sole restaurants to Culinary Capers Catering in Vancouver.

The most recent chapter in the life of Sue and her husband/business partner Bob began when they moved to Whistler in 1988 where they purchased the Grocery Store and Delish Café & Catering. Sales doubled every year for the first three years and in 1998 they opened the Pemberton Valley Supermarket as well. The couple has earned a number of Diamond and Platinum Awards for Business Excellence from the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers.

Sue has devoted significant time throughout her career to mentoring and inspiring others in the development of their own small businesses. “When I see young

women struggle early in their careers, it often seems to relate to a lack of confidence,” she says. “A turning point for me was when I realized the power of networking and what can be accomplished when you become actively involved in an organization.”

In 1999, she started Women of Whistler (WOW) which has an active group of approximately 150 women who attend events throughout the year. She feels she has benefited greatly from her many board appointments and affiliations, particularly the nine years she spent as a Director and Vice Chair of the North Shore Credit Union and six years as Chair of the Vancouver Playhouse and International Wine Festival.

The 2007 Business in Vancouver Woman of Influence Award was the most recent recognition of Sue's strong leadership skills and passion for whatever she is doing. “Whether I am operating a restaurant or a business organization, I want it to be the best, most wholesome entity it can be,” she says. “True satisfaction for me comes from lifelong learning – helping others learn and growing myself at the same time.”

*“Career satisfaction is more about personal growth than tangible success”*

# Maria Arankunda

WORLD SHINE LTD.  
7621 6TH STREET, BURNABY, BC  
604.524.0681



While it is important for entrepreneurs to be knowledgeable in their area of business, “people come to you because of your heart—the way you treat them,” says Maria Arankunda. Maria had her own business in her native country of Rwanda, where she was specially trained to care for all types of curly and kinky hair, providing weaving, hair extensions and braiding.

When she came to Canada in 1998, she found that starting over in a new country wasn’t so easy. Maria had always been a self-employed businesswoman, so the transition was difficult. “I had to go to work for someone else when I came to Canada and it was hard,” she says.

It took awhile but in 2005, she was finally able to open her own salon again. But getting funding wasn’t easy. “Nobody wants to give you money,” she says. “When you have money they give it to you, when you don’t have it they won’t give it. The only loan I ever got was from Women’s Enterprise Centre.”

Her persistence has paid off. World Shine Ltd. carries a product line designed for dark skin and kinky hair, as well as human hair wigs, extensions and weaves. “I now have a barber, an esthetician and people who are experts in

extensions and braiding,” she says.

Maria is looking forward to bringing in more products and opening a bigger shop.

“Now that I’m back working for myself, I am happier. I’m always happy, but I’m even happier now. I work as long as I want, when I want.”

“You have to be trained in the business you are going to do,” Maria advises potential entrepreneurs. “Having desire isn’t enough. You have to know what you are doing and enjoy what you do.” She believes an entrepreneur needs to be willing to invest her time and money and she needs to be a good leader. A kind heart is essential to good leadership, she says. “You must be humble, be a good listener and have patience.”

*“Be prepared and have lots of patience. You have to love it; if you don’t love it, you won’t last.”*

“Success is obtaining financial stability doing what you love”



“A leader is someone who is willing to listen and share their experiences to help others make their own decisions in life”

## Helen Bell

REEL STEEL LTD.

204 100 PARK ROYAL SOUTH, WEST VANCOUVER, BC  
604.913.0310 | [www.reelsteel.ca](http://www.reelsteel.ca)

Helen Bell's company, Reel Steel Ltd., which began with a single employee, now employs 38 and is currently installing two-thirds of the reinforcing steel for the Vancouver Olympic Village for the 2010 Winter Games.

The idea for the business started 20 years ago when her husband Mike was injured at work. As he recuperated, he decided that if he was going to work that hard, he should be working for himself. Helen, self-taught in bookkeeping and accounting, agreed. They began networking and cold calling, looking for work and before long Reel Steel was born.

“In 1987, there were no women working in the industry,” she says. “Even today there are very few women who own rebar companies.”

Helen was adopted out of her culture and her community, but she credits both her adoptive parents and her Carrier First Nation ancestry for her success. “The Carrier philosophy is to share and to make sure everyone in the community is doing well,” she says, “and that’s how we’ve run the company from the very beginning.”

This philosophy has obviously paid off. “We were poor as

dirt when we started 20 years ago and today we just came back from taking our employees on a weekend of fishing, helicopter tours, spa visits and generally relaxing,” she says. “I love the relationship we have with our employees – we are like family and help each other out and know what is going on with everyone.”

Entrepreneurs really have to love what they are doing, Helen advises, and she recommends plenty of courage, too. “You have to be able to see the future of your business,” she says. “We never once thought it wouldn’t be successful.”

Helen, who recently earned a BA in First Nations Studies at UBC, is working on her Masters degree while working full-time. She is happy to share her success by helping first nations groups and giving back to the community at large.

*“My parents taught me a very good work ethic.”*

# Victoria Biggs

UNIQUELY GREEN HOME DÉCOR  
20241 FRASER HIGHWAY, LANGLEY, BC  
604.530.6765 | [www.uniquelygreen.ca](http://www.uniquelygreen.ca)

Victoria Biggs was out shopping for good quality used furniture in the Fraser Valley without success. She was also looking for a job. It dawned on her that this might be a good opportunity to open a business.

Uniquely Yours Furniture on Consignment opened in 2001 and was like nothing else in Langley, she says. At the time, people considered consignment furniture to be stuff other people didn't want. "We had to re-educate them," says Victoria, "into understanding that this furniture wasn't old or dirty, it was very nice and brought to us by people who may be downsizing or moving. Because there was no other model to build upon we had to create it from scratch." As people have become more environmentally conscious and interested in recycling, it has become easier. Victoria recently renamed the store Uniquely Green Home Décor and says "we are now moving towards "green" furniture."

Many of the people in Victoria's family are or have been self-employed; even her grandmother had her own store. Despite her entrepreneurial lineage, things did not run smoothly. "It was a disaster when I started my business. I started the same year as 9/11, the next year the stock

market crashed. Financially, it was a struggle."

Even so, Victoria loves being her own boss. "When you become a business owner you are forever changed from who you were," she says. "Before my world was very small and consisted of me, my family and my friends. Now I'm involved with Rotary and international charity projects, I'm much more involved in the community. I feel I'm a success because I've created a world that is larger than myself. I got out there and became a global citizen."

Her advice to others who are considering a stroll down the entrepreneurial path is unique. "To me owning a business is like having children. You can tell someone before they have children what it is like to have children, but they don't get it. It's the same with starting a business; you don't really get it until you are in it."

*"Just when you think you've got it figured out - something else will happen."*



Charlie Vowels

“When you become a business owner you are forever changed from who you were”



# Heather Creelman-Jenkins

1 FISH 2 FISH SEAFOOD MARKET INC.  
20534 FRASER HIGHWAY, LANGLEY, BC  
604.532.5226 | [www.1fish2fish.ca](http://www.1fish2fish.ca)

“If you really want it, don’t give up easily; find a way to do it. The more you concentrate on your business the more it will prosper, so don’t obsess about the competition... but still keep a keen eye on them”

Thirteen is Heather Creelman-Jenkins’ lucky number. When she and former business partner, Susan Jardine opened 1 Fish 2 Fish Seafood Market on Friday the 13th, 1998, her goal was to be Langley’s main supplier of seafood. “People were happy they didn’t have to go into Vancouver anymore,” she says. With over 50 different seafood items, she provides the same selection as some of the downtown markets. “We carry as many organic and chemical free products as possible,” she says. “And we were doing it before it was chic to do it.”

Heather had worked in various seafood markets while going to school and for a year she had been thinking about opening her own shop. “It just sort of came up,” she says. “I put together a plan and it happened.”

When she started looking for financing, Heather met a roadblock. “Nobody wanted to play with me,” she says. That changed when she approached Women’s Enterprise Centre. “They took a chance and it was awesome. I’m so thankful.”

Entrepreneurs need to be ready to take chances, Heather says, and they need plenty of determination and commitment. “A lot of people around me were very

skeptical but I wasn’t going to listen to them,” she says. “When I hit my five year mark someone asked me if I even thought I’d make it this far; I told them I never thought I wouldn’t.”

Heather believes a leader is someone who can communicate their vision to others and have a positive attitude. She learned her work ethic from a former boss, André Béchar, whom she admired for his dedication to his business.

In 2005, 1 Fish 2 Fish was named Small Business of the Year for the Greater Langley Chamber of Commerce and in 2008, Heather was nominated for a Langley Women of Excellence Award.

*“When I hit my five year mark someone asked me if I even thought I’d make it this far; I told them I never thought I wouldn’t.”*

# Shushma Datt

IT PRODUCTIONS LTD.

110 3060 NORLAND AVENUE, BURNABY, BC

604.299.8863 | [www.rj1200.com](http://www.rj1200.com)



Shushma Datt knew she had achieved success when she was able to follow her dream and create the first electronic media company in Western Canada that features South Asian programming.

As a young journalist working for the BBC in London, Shushma says she always knew she wanted to own a radio station. It took more than 20 years and a move to a new country to get her own AM station, but in 2005, she was granted a license for RJ1200 in the Vancouver market by the CRTC.

When she immigrated to Canada in 1972, Shushma started working with CJVB as a host for Indian Programming and at CHQM as a radio operator. She decided to fill a programming void in 1976 and started producing programming for the South Asian community. In 1987, Shushma started broadcasting a 24-hour radio station on subcarrier radio CJJR.

“It was quite hard in the sense that I was not a businesswoman,” Shushma says. She looked for role models — strong women who did something unique — for guidance. “When I meet someone like that I want to learn from them,” she says. “Everyone has something

to teach.”

An entrepreneur, according to Shushma, is fearless and has the ability to pursue a vision. “I’ve never worried about finances,” she says. “I always felt it would come and it did.” Women’s Enterprise Centre believed in her vision as well.

Shushma received an Influential Women in Business award in 2007 and she understands the importance of what she does. “It makes you very responsible for what you are producing and what you are out there to do,” she says. “Your responsibility quadruples as a business person. I am always very conscious of the topics I discuss on air. Non-profit and women’s issues are now my main passions.”

Now that she has achieved her dream, Shushma has set a new goal for herself. “The concept has expanded to the point where I have my radio station and now I want my own TV station.”

*“Everyone has something to teach.”*

“Follow your heart and do it because where there is a will, there is a way”



“At the beginning it was about having fun and being small-time. Now it’s about growing with things like multiple locations, having our own product line and promoting from within”

## Chela Davison

HAVEN HAIR INC.

4 15782 MARINE DRIVE, WHITE ROCK, BC

604.536.0296 | [www.havenhair.com](http://www.havenhair.com)

Chela Davison started her own business out of sheer enthusiasm. “I was 19, had no long-term goals and thought I could do anything,” she says.

Even as a small child, Chela knew she would own a business. While she was working in a salon as an apprentice, she had a lot of creative ideas and thought it would be fun to have her own shop: one where she could do whatever she wanted. In the spring of 2000 her brother lent her the money, they did their own renovations and within six months Haven Hair was open for business.

“When I first opened, I wanted a little salon with an eco-friendly and family-oriented edge to it,” she says. “We are still eco-friendly, but now the vision is a lot larger.”

Inclusive human resource policies have played a key role in her success. Chela encourages her employees to play a large part in shaping their work environment, helping establish the business’ vision, financial goals and marketing. “The staff get to have their own creative spin on how they do their job,” she says.

They are also customer-focused. She and her staff call every customer to make sure they’ve had an exceptional

experience and they are fully involved in their community, donating time and products — even shaving their own hair for a good cause.

Eight successful years later, Chela has grown too. “I’ve become an adult through my business,” she says. “I experienced a greater level of responsibility than my peers have over the years and my ability to deal with all sorts of people has increased.” Owning the business has given her the opportunity to refine her people skills and become an exceptional leader, which she defines as “somebody who is compassionate, can communicate vision to others and walks their talk.”

Chela advises potential entrepreneurs to enlist professional help for any aspect of the business. “Have a really good bookkeeper and accountant. Don’t do your books yourself; focus on the main part of your business,” she suggests. “Hire a business coach to keep you on track”.

*“We have always been about contributing to the community.”*

# Shehla Ebrahim

AFTERGLOW SKIN & LASER CENTRE  
104-2609 WESTVIEW DRIVE NORTH VANCOUVER, BC  
604.980.3993 | [www.afterglowskincare.ca](http://www.afterglowskincare.ca)

When Shehla Ebrahim immigrated to Canada from Pakistan in 1986, she faced many hurdles on the path to achieving her dreams. It was faith that drove her forward to become the reputable doctor and entrepreneur that she is today.

Not that becoming an entrepreneur was an easy decision for her. “There was definitely a distinct fear of failure! Starting my own business seemed like such a daunting task at the time, but deep down inside I believed in myself and knew that I could do it,” she says.

In 2002, Ebrahim opened the doors to Afterglow Skin & Laser Centre; a physician-supervised clinic that offers a variety of services, including Botox, soft tissue fillers, laser rejuvenation microdermabrasion, chemical peels and laser skin resurfacing. With a great desire to learn everything she could about business, Ebrahim turned to Women’s Enterprise Centre.

“It was really Women’s Enterprise that helped me get my business off the ground. I spoke one-to-one with someone who went through business planning information and market research with me,” says Ebrahim. “I purchased their series of Learning Guides and took the Focused Marketing workshop.” The star pupil is now excelling on her own.

[womensenterprise.ca](http://womensenterprise.ca)

Now completing her third year in business, Ebrahim is already developing an expansion plan. “I’m excited about offering medical spa services to the male market. I plan to take over more space and make it more gender neutral.”

With her expansion, she also wants to focus on mental well-being by bringing in counselling services for her clients.

With her business well underway, Ebrahim has had time to start on her other passion; giving back to others. She has climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro to raise \$50,000 for the Children’s Hospital, travelled to Tibet with a non-profit organization to provide free medical services to the nomads of Eastern Tibet and in the next two years plans to take on Mt. Everest, also for charity.

Of everything she has learned in life, Ebrahim has one thing that stands out as most important: “Don’t be afraid to dream big as long as you have the right intentions and the right attitude. Treat your relationships as gifts and have humility in leadership.”

*“Starting my own business seemed like such a daunting task at the time, but deep down inside I believed in myself and knew that I could do it.”*

New Pioneers | Lower Mainland & South Coast



Tamara Roberts Studio 2

“Don’t be afraid to dream big as long as you have the right intentions and the right attitude. Treat your relationships as gifts and have humility in leadership”



Bruce Klasson

“Place as much emphasis on good business practices as quality and service”

## Susan Gagnon

SYKA TEXTILES TRADING CORP.

104 32885 MISSION WAY, MISSION, BC

1.800.901.8260 | [www.syka.ca](http://www.syka.ca)

Susan Gagnon learned early that being an industry pioneer has both an up and a down side. The upside is that you are the only one in your field so you can blaze new paths and reap the benefits. The downside is that, first; you must familiarize people with your product and then, convince them of its value.

Susan's company, SYKA® Textiles, established in 2005, is the first Canadian company to focus exclusively on eco-conscious fabrics. The Mission-based wholesaler and distributor has also encouraged many Canadian designers to use these fabrics, helping to increase overall awareness and support for sustainable fashion.

“Almost all of the designers we spoke with initially had never heard of fabrics made from fibres like bamboo or soy, so we spent a lot of time introducing them to these fabrics and their benefits,” she says.

With a loan from Women's Enterprise Centre, Susan and her husband/partner Yves focused on becoming a respected fabric house first. Having a strong presence at international trade events was critical to the education process and building key relationships within the fashion

industry. “As our relationships with the design community evolved, it was a bonus that our fabrics were eco-friendly as well as fashionable and beautiful.”

The company's Eco-Lux™ line includes fabrics made from organic cotton, bamboo, soy, lyocell and hemp that are mindfully sourced from mills in Europe and Asia. The fabrics are chosen based on European fashion forecasts and some are even created based on what designers request in the way of weight and texture.

By placing as much emphasis on good business practices as quality and service – and expecting the same from its suppliers – SYKA® has earned international respect and acknowledgement. Its fabrics have been featured in numerous national and international fashion events, from Canada's largest fashion show during L'Oreal Fashion Week in 2007 to recent coverage in Elle Magazine (US) in May 2008. SYKA® also contributed a chapter to a book by New York's Earth Pledge.

*“The most important lesson I've learned through entrepreneurship is never to give up.”*

# Maria Green

NEW WESTMINSTER DENTURE CLINIC

624 6TH STREET, SUITE 203, NEW WESTMINSTER, BC  
604.521.6424 | [www.newwestminsterdentureclinic.com](http://www.newwestminsterdentureclinic.com)

Age is no deterrent when following one's dreams. Just ask Maria Green. She decided to go back to school at the age of 40 after seeing the long-term potential of a dental mechanic and denturist program. "Age doesn't matter; if you are determined to do something, just do it," she says.

In her class of fifteen, there were only two women. "It is a very male-dominated industry now," she says, "even more so then." She graduated with honours in 1998 and started making dentures, partials and dentures on implants.

But after four years of schooling, Maria had no money left for start-up. She applied for and received financing through Women's Enterprise Centre. Then it took her about four months to find a business. A denturist was retiring and she bought his clinic. Maria says that while it was good to step into a fully equipped office, it took a few years to establish her own reputation.

She found clients appreciated her attention to aesthetics and detail. "Many of my patients are women who are using my service to make sure the dentures or partials are aesthetically pleasing as well as functional and they

seem to feel more comfortable talking to a woman about it," Maria says.

When she was forced to relocate because her building was slated for demolition, she was a little nervous. Fortunately, her clients followed. "I had to move into a new place and rebuild." She says she is in a better location now, with a better office and all the latest equipment. An added bonus: "I live two blocks away and I can walk to work."

While she was getting the New Westminster Denture Clinic off the ground, Maria spent a lot of time at work. "The first four years I was working six days a week," she says. "After that I went down to five days a week and finally got weekends off."

Plenty has changed in Maria's life since she went back to school. "I am much more independent now that I have my own business," she says. "Now I am married to a wonderful man and life is good."

*"Success is doing what you like in life  
and getting paid for it."*



“Age doesn't matter; if  
you are determined to do  
something, just do it”



“Have faith, take risks,  
have a plan and embrace  
change. Do this and  
success will follow”

## Karen Kallweit Graham

KALLWEIT GRAHAM ARCHITECTURE INC.  
6422 BAY STREET, WEST VANCOUVER, BC  
604.921.8044 | [www.renoreport.com](http://www.renoreport.com)

For the first seven years of Karen’s architectural career, she worked in corporate architectural firms doing large projects such as lab buildings, community centres and hotels. When she had her first child in 1992, it became quickly apparent that flexibility and proximity to home would be important to balance career and family. It was at this point she decided to hang out her own shingle and ‘go for it’. She was joined by her architect-husband, Ross, in 1993, when his own position in a large firm became unstable.

“Going into business for oneself can be an extremely scary undertaking; it basically requires confidence in one’s own ability and a huge leap of faith,” she says. In Karen’s case, this was a particular challenge given their household had zero income, one child and a mortgage. Starting with no client base, Karen and Ross used all their RRSP savings to survive the first two years at which time child number two arrived.

It was at this point that Karen hit on the idea of providing a specialized approach to their service. They introduced fixed-fee RenoReports to ease clients into the building process. Karen explains: “People are very

unfamiliar with the design and building process, which can be very intimidating. The reports provide valuable information in a step-by-step manner. Their purpose is to establish design possibilities and budget early in the process: critical information for the client to determine if the project is even feasible. From our perspective, the reports also provide an excellent educational tool.”

This new product introduced another challenge: marketing. “I had to go WAY out of my comfort zone to do this one!” she says. The reports proved very successful and the business grew, specializing in custom homes and renovations.

“We went from the small, ‘over the garage firm’ to being quite large for our type of projects. This presented another challenge: determining what was the critical mass for our firm. Ross and I began to get unhappily buried in paperwork, marketing and production, losing sight of our love to design homes. So, we’ve now cut back and refocused more on the creative side,” Karen says.

*“I had to go WAY out of my comfort zone... big time.”*

# LeiLani Kopp & Tana McNicol

SWEET LEILANI COLOUR COSMECEUTICALS

8 6280 202 STREET, LANGLEY, BC

778.896.4891 | [www.sweetleilani.com](http://www.sweetleilani.com)



LeiLani Kopp's sense of compassion led her to forge a new business that has changed its customers' lives. LeiLani, a cosmetic designer in the beauty, film and TV industries, was volunteering with cancer patients when she saw the need for a special type of corrective cosmetic. Their skin had become highly sensitive and they needed a way to camouflage post-surgical bruising, scarring, burns and side effects from their medical treatments.

LeiLani realized no one was in the business of paramedical camouflage. So in 1992, after two years of researching ingredients and consulting with dermatologists and doctors, she came up with her first cover stick. Today, Sweet LeiLani Colour Cosmeceuticals, offers a product line that can cover or mask anything from normal skin discolouration to deep tissue burns. "Our products help people get back to work quicker and get out into the world," says LeiLani.

It was LeiLani's sister, Tana McNicol, who recommended she expand her line so that everyone could use the products. After working with the cover stick for six years, she started developing a complete skin care cosmetic line, which they launched in 2002 with a loan from Women's Enterprise Centre. The line is beneficial for people with

burns, acne, rosacea, scarring, tattoos, under-eye circles, as well as those just wanting more healthy looking skin.

LeiLani says her mother was instrumental in her success. "There were so many things she would have loved to have done and didn't. She encouraged me to follow my dreams."

LeiLani says would-be entrepreneurs should "do your homework, find a mentor and believe that you can do it," while Tana cautions, "make sure you are willing to make the financial sacrifices it takes to grow a business."

The sisters are now 50/50 partners and looking to grow their company. "We want to go big and we are looking for investors. At some point you just can't do it by yourself anymore."

"We are now able to reach more burn survivors than before," Tana says. "The medical side of the business has taken off and we are now well-established as a paramedical makeup provider and in teaching people how to apply it with confidence."

*"Make sure you are willing to make the financial sacrifices it takes to grow a business."*

“Do your homework, find a mentor and believe that you can do it”



“I make changes where they’re needed so that life doesn’t feel so overrun”

## Grace Kreykenbohm

INSIGNIA RECOGNITION & ID PRODUCTS  
NORTH DELTA, BC  
604.590.2516 | [www.insigniarecognition.ca](http://www.insigniarecognition.ca)

If Grace Kreykenbohm ever decides to sell her business, she might want to try a career in tightrope walking. She knows that the key to success is all about achieving balance.

It took the North Delta, BC mother of six a few years to come to that realization, but now, having work-life balance is her number one priority. “Balance is more important to me than high sales and high growth. My business has to adjust to my values,” she says.

In 2005, Grace was struggling to manage her children, aged 18 months to 17 years and her home-based engraving business. “As the business began to grow, I became more consumed by it,” she says. “I was putting in long hours, trying to do everything and be everything. I was stressed and tired and had very little time for myself, my kids and my husband.”

She says it wasn’t long before she reached her breaking point. “Things were not being done to my complete satisfaction. I wanted to meet my customers’ expectations but when you try and do everything, this standard becomes difficult to meet.” Her resolution was to reinstate balance in her life.

Now that she has reached a state of equilibrium, Grace is ready for new challenges. ‘I’ve changed the name of the company to Insignia Recognition & ID Products to reflect our four product lines,” she says. Launching in the fall of 2008, will be a new product line called EnableLabel which uses shapes, words and Braille to help young children stay organized. As Grace explains, “For instance, the shirt label, in the shape of a shirt, attaches to the outside of the child’s drawer containing the shirts. The word ‘shirt’ will appear on the label, both engraved and in Braille, so even children with visual impairments can put away their laundry without assistance.”

Grace has hired her sister to run the engraving end of the business while she focuses on the marketing plan for EnableLabel.com. “I’m still going to keep balance in my life and until my now four-year-old is in school full-time, I’m keeping the business at home,” she says.

*“I close my office door at 5 pm; no exceptions”*

# Shelina Mawani & Nasim Dhanji

NANA'S KITCHEN AND HOT SAUCES LTD.  
12 8125 130TH STREET, SURREY, BC  
604.572.6202 | [www.nanasauce.com](http://www.nanasauce.com)

Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, sisters Nasim Dhanji and Shelina Mawani were destined to own their own business. Before moving to Canada, Nasim was a fashion designer by profession, owned a factory and had 20 employees all over Kenya. She was having difficulty finding work here so she enrolled in an entrepreneurial course at the YWCA. She was also experimenting with different hot sauces at home and her friends and family suggested she start selling them instead of giving them away. She began making small quantities for sale in 1998.

Around the same time her sister, Shelina Mawani, lost her job. The two decided to go into business together, producing the sauces wholesale. Shelina became a full partner in 2001.

They now offer 25 products, including samosa and butter chicken paste, using only quality ingredients so their products always taste homemade.

When they first started out, they had little in the way of finances. They went to their friends and family for help. "We kept going under and under and the family name was at stake," says Nasim. "I'd convince my sister, 'Let's

just go on for two more months,' and after two months it still wasn't better so she would tell me, 'Let's just go on for two more months...'. This went on for almost two years and eventually we got a loan from Women's Enterprise Centre. UBC was one of our first clients, they gave us a break and we still supply to them."

"I've learned a lot," says Shelina. "It's been really hard making ends meet but it has taught me to be a stronger person. My kids have seen this and have become stronger because of it."

"I am more confident now that I've passed so many challenges, so nothing stops me," says Nasim.

The sisters' perseverance has paid off. They have expanded five times since the business started and now are able to employ other new immigrants. They have achieved their own definition of success: 'Someone who never gives up on their dream' (Nasim) and 'Being able to achieve something and know the sky is the limit.' (Shelina)

*"Anything can be conquered with hard work, persistence is the key."*



Farna Photography

“Never call something a problem—it is just a situation that needs a solution”



## Jinous Nourinejad

STICK WITH US PRODUCTS INC.  
P.O. BOX 26190, RICHMOND, BC  
604.241.0448 | [www.moom.com](http://www.moom.com)

“You need a good strategy  
to sell your products  
combined with solid  
service and support for  
the stores that carry them”

Jinous Nouri’s family faced a sticky situation when they first immigrated to Canada from Iran. Like many new Canadian professionals, they were dealing with an unfamiliar language and culture, skills that weren’t directly transferable and the need to bring in an income.

When Jinous could not find employment as a chemist in Vancouver, she decided to use some of her greatest assets: determination, a passion for creating healthy skincare products and a supportive family with a strong work ethic to venture out on her own. She had been experimenting for a number of years with a natural hair removal product that was free of chemicals and wax. She perfected the formula in 1991, called it MOOM — a term used in her native Persian language referring to the process of hair removal — and began production in her kitchen.

At the time there was no other product made from food products such as the sugar, lemon juice and chamomile tea used in MOOM. “Finding the right marketing strategy was compounded by the language difference and the fact that in Iran, most new products are readily welcomed by the consumer,” Jinous recalls. “Here you need a good

strategy to sell your products combined with solid service and support for the stores that carry them.”

Two years ago the company began using only 100 per cent organic ingredients, further preserving the integrity of the product and ensuring that MOOM stood out in the competitive health products industry. Today the company, Stick With Us Products Inc., sells a line of 19 natural hair removal and skincare products through North American health and beauty supply stores, on-line retailers, drugs store chains and TV shopping channels around the world. While new products are constantly being added to their line, MOOM continues to be the company’s signature product.

Jinous’ experience as a new Canadian entrepreneur is an example to all new start-ups: “Believe in your work – then start small, really get to know your market and be honest with your customers.”

*“Believe in your work – then start small, really get to know your market and be honest with your customers.”*

# Lillian O'Brien

AFRICOUTURE

P.O. BOX 97135, 120 8011 SABA ROAD, RICHMOND, BC  
604.910.0805 | [www.africouture.com](http://www.africouture.com)

In her former homeland, 'Lilly Maks' was a household name. The African-based fashion designer had operated a successful business for many years in Zambia and Zimbabwe, hosted her own television show and counted many celebrities among her clients.

So why would Lilly, aka Lillian O'Brien, leave that behind and start over in Canada in 2003? To begin the process she calls "Africa Meets West" and establish AfriCouture, a unique business that showcases her African heritage by merging art, culture and fashion.

Professionally trained in fashion design in England, it was in Zambia that Lillian met the wife of a former Zambian diplomat, Bina Kamana. Bina was also a fashion designer and became her mentor, helping Lillian make connections with influential business people interested in her work. As Lillian's reputation grew, she became known as the 'Empress of Fashion' eventually hosting her own television show for Cheeseborough Ponds Zambia.

When she decided to move to Canada with her two daughters, she had to deal with the challenge of building her business from the ground up once again as well as the cultural differences that many new Canadians face.

Living in Vancouver, she adapted her fashions to Western tastes and a different climate, adding such items as scarves, capes and men's African shirts to her designs – all incorporating hand-woven and hand-printed fabrics imported from Africa. She began to participate in fashion shows and opened a small store in Richmond and later moved to downtown Vancouver. Drawing on her vast network of contacts, she created a website through which she brokers authentic African art and gift items.

Through her additional involvement with the Great Zimbabwe Cultural Association and United African Communities of BC, Lillian helps to bring together new immigrants in Canada from all ethnic communities to showcase the glamour and beauty of Africa. "It is my hope that my story will inspire many 'women of substance' and show other immigrants how they can use their skills and abilities to make their way in Canada," she says.

*"Find a mentor who can help you make connections."*



Mahri Photo Studio

“It is my hope that my story will inspire other immigrants to use their skills and abilities to make their way in Canada”

Michael Parker



# Nancy Parker

EYEBROWZ DESIGN INC.  
36476 COUNTRY PLACE, ABBOTSFORD, BC  
604.854.0117 | [www.eyebrowz.com](http://www.eyebrowz.com)

Nancy Parker's company was born out of a frustration she shared with thousands of other women: how to get the perfect eyebrow. She identified small salons which offer make-up services as her target market and spent more than a year conducting on-line focus groups with make-up artists about brow solutions and techniques.

When she launched her website in 1997 featuring a wide range of carefully chosen products, including some she helped formulate, the response was so strong she and her husband left their full-time positions to focus on Eyebrowz Designs. Sales have increased every year since Eyebrowz' inception; its products are now sold around the world to salons and chain stores and Nancy has authored two books on the subject as well. "That initial research and really listening to the problems of the make-up technician were the key to how we shaped the business," Nancy says. "While our website is an essential tool, our customers know they can talk with us about our products. We listen carefully to their needs in order to provide them with solutions."

Nancy and her husband both came from strong business backgrounds. She was a Chartered Accountant, and her

husband worked in management with a large oil company. But her venture into entrepreneurship still included a valuable learning curve. "When you're starting out, you have to be prepared for people to knock your idea – after all, you're doing something that is 'outside the box' and comfort zone of most people. And you have to approach every challenge you encounter as an opportunity – if you don't have enough money to do what you want to do, for example, learn to be creative with what you've got."

She also recommends having a strategy for coping with stress, whether it's yoga, music or having a mentor for guidance. "That support can mean the difference between throwing in the towel and perseverance," she says.

Eleven years of steady growth for Eyebrowz has only fuelled Nancy's enthusiasm for the future of her business. "We're constantly looking at new products and ways to improve production and customer service. Every day is new and exciting."

*"People will knock your idea because you're doing something that is 'outside the box'."*

“If you don't have enough money to do what you want to do, learn to be creative with what you've got”

# Angie Quaale

WELL SEASONED

302C 20771 LANGLEY BY-PASS, LANGLEY, BC

604.530.1518 | [www.wellseasoned.ca](http://www.wellseasoned.ca)

Angie Quaale has always worked in the food industry, so it was no surprise that when she opened her own business in June 2004, it would involve food. The difference, she says, is “before I had a job. Now, I have the greatest life.”

Angie’s Well Seasoned gourmet food store carries hard to find spices, sauces and cookware and specializes in locally made food. “We also operate a cooking school that brings experts into the valley to teach about cooking, new flavour and new foods.”

Her food background meant she came into the business with relationships already formed with producers, manufacturers and farmers. “I actually know who grows my food or makes my food and I go out of my way to find it,” she says.

“I started the company with my own money that I had saved,” she says. “My mom gave me help for the first 60 to 90 days and I was able to pay her back quickly. Then I got a personal line of credit.”

Like many businesses, Well Seasoned has changed from Angie’s initial concept. “The cooking school is much

bigger than I expected it to be,” she says. “I thought it would be the hardest to grow but it has taken on a life of its own. I have more relationships now with food people than I ever had before. The business is still growing and it’s fun to watch it evolve. We carry a lot more locally produced food than we originally planned because when we started there just wasn’t that much available.”

Angie’s role models are her mom and her grandmothers. “They cooked real food every day. They taught me how important it is to have that connection with family and friends,” she says. “If I can get people to all sit together once or twice a week, that’s wicked.”

Angie’s life includes a generous helping of support for other women in her community too, especially through her volunteer roles with the Valley Women’s Network.

*“Stick to your knitting, don’t try and be or do everything. If you want to expand, expand what you are doing now and do it well.”*



Dennis Davidson, Keepsake Portraits

“I get to do something every day that makes me think ‘how cool is that’. I never had that when I worked for other people”



# Tami Reilly

GO GET ORGANIZED

787 16TH STREET EAST, NORTH VANCOUVER, BC

888.893.2816 | [www.gogetorganized.com](http://www.gogetorganized.com)

“Don’t underestimate the power of picking up the phone and telling people what you are doing. It’s the ‘Ready, Fire! Aim’ approach”

Necessity is the mother of invention and in 1998 what Tami Reilly really needed was a way to organize her office. She was trying to keep track of the day-to-day information needed to run her equipment lease financing business. Her ‘a-ha’ moment came when she realized she wasn’t the only business owner who needed a system to find things fast.

Within a week, she had launched a new business and had her first client.

Go Get Organized was the first business of its kind. Tami started on a shoestring budget: she didn’t even have business cards. From the very beginning, Tami developed the business so it could be franchised. “I wasn’t just going out there as a sole business owner,” she says. “I wanted to build a company.” Now she is able to sell licenses for the concept of the business.

She recommends Michael Gerber’s book, *The E-Myth: Why Most Small Businesses Don’t Work and What to Do About It* to other entrepreneurs. “It’s a great guide to start off with,” she says.

Four years ago Tami wrote her own book, *The One Day*

*Office Organizer*, and moved more to an Internet business model and selling the books through a publisher. “It gives businesses who buy a license from me a product to sell and an additional stream of income for my company,” she says.

Tami has adapted her business to the changing needs of her clients and the realities in the employment environment. “Two years ago, finding the calibre of people needed in the company was getting harder,” she says. “I decided to switch to a more business management model where I manage other people’s staff to organize and manage their office, instead of hiring my own staff to send into their business.”

When Tami started this business she hoped it would allow her to make more time for her family. “The original concept was four days for the kids and three days for my business. It ended up that I worked full-time hours around the needs of my family.”

*“A leader is someone who inspires others to reach their own potential.”*

# Anne Toube

LEOPARDS & ROSES TRADING INC.  
7520 BARKERVILLE COURT, RICHMOND, BC  
604.241.1882 | [www.leopardsandroses.com](http://www.leopardsandroses.com)

Having been a successful business owner in South Africa, Anne Toube was confident she could open a store when she arrived in Canada in 1998. It failed.

In 1999, she started again. This time she opened a wholesale/import business with a partner, importing products from South Africa. She soon realized the Canadian market wasn't as open as she had originally thought. "It took me a long time to realize how different Canada was and I still don't think I understand it all," she says.

She changed direction again and today, she is the full owner of Leopards & Roses Trading Inc. in Richmond. As a wholesaler, Anne imports a wide variety of handmade clothing and accessories, this time from Nepal. "The clothing is funky rather than classic or normal," she says.

When she switched to importing from Nepal, she found the products sold quickly, reaching people from age 12 to 60. "It's not age-specific clothing - it is easy clothing that has appeal," she says. "A lot of our retail customers have stayed since we've switched lines. They are like-minded and care about where the product comes from, how it's

produced and who it helps."

When she goes to Nepal on buying trips, Anne visits all the factories to ensure the working conditions are acceptable. One of the factories she buys from employs 100 women and teaches them how to do the embroidery. That example of women entrepreneurs supporting other women is important to Anne.

Although she started her company without financing, Anne later received a loan from Women's Enterprise Centre. Originally based in a large warehouse, she has since purchased an additional home from which she could run the business, creating a more relaxed work environment.

Looking back, Anne recognizes that there are no easy paths or solutions – there's lots of trial and error. "It's been a good road with its ups and downs. I'm very contented where I am at."

*"My daughter now works with me and she can bring her daughter to work. It's a family business."*



“People tend to ‘buy’ you,  
not your product or service, so  
look at how you represent  
yourself”



“Delegate as much as you can and still keep your eyes on the details. You still have to steer the business in the right direction whether starting or transitioning”

## Angela Tunner

EAT LIKE A MILLIONAIRE OMNIMEDIA INC.  
SUITE 236, 800 15355 24TH AVENUE, SURREY, BC  
800.496.0484 | [www.angelatunner.com](http://www.angelatunner.com)

Angela Tunner, also known as The Renaissance Gourmet, has cooked up a multimedia experience that is changing the way people look at food. In January 2007, she launched Eat Like A Millionaire Omnimedia Inc., a “culinary and lifestyle multimedia production and publishing company.” Through video, a blog, the web and private and public classes, she teaches her clients to use simple ingredients and time-saving methods to bring good fresh food to the table with gourmet results.

“I’ve been referred to as a practical Martha Stewart,” Angela says.

Angela first thought of the business mid 2006. “I had the biggest moment of clarity after my child was born,” she says. “I hadn’t worked in a year, had helped my husband build his company and realized I felt like a noodle. I also had an awful lot of culinary and lifestyle knowledge to share and I wanted to help people live better, show them how easy cooking really is, to help them cook at home more often. Everything fell into place and came together so fast it was amazing. The first book was designed, written, edited, bound and printed all within two months.”

“When I first started, my vision was to become the biggest culinary brand that Canada has ever seen,” says Angela. “I had it all in mind, the corporation built using a virtual model, the book, the TV series, the licensing, the whole nine yards. My vision has not changed and is well-received. My next vision is to have two shows on the air; one food-focused with a lifestyle angle and a second show on the new Oprah Winfrey Network, a new network that begins airing in 2009.”

Angela’s advice for potential entrepreneurs: “Make sure that you don’t second guess yourself. If you have the passion and believe in it, despite what anyone says, go for it and be fearless.”

*“The things I help people to do with their home and their food are easy, accessible and attainable.”*

# Marlene Xenis

THE XENIS COLLECTION LTD.  
26660 60TH AVENUE, ALDERGROVE, BC  
888.999.9617 | [www.xenis.com](http://www.xenis.com)



When little girls grow up, most of them put away their dolls. Marlene Xenis decided to create a business out of hers.

She started making floppy dolls that played music in 1994, supplementing the income she earned in administrative roles. When her craft sales reached an adequate level, she left her job and started making music box dolls full-time. She used her severance pay to finance her start-up and in 2000 she bought new equipment and hired staff with a loan she received through Women's Enterprise Centre.

The Xenis Collection Ltd. is now a family-run business with Marlene and her two daughters, Tanya Xenis and Jessie Geeraert. Their dolls are made entirely from Canadian Western Maple and the faces are painted by hand. Marlene designs the clothing and contracts out the sewing locally.

Marlene says her mother was her role model. "She was always into making costumes; she loved music and the arts," she recalls. "Once I got involved in business, my mentor was my first buyer in Australia, George Rotenstein. He prepaid the order and years later when I

asked him why he was so generous he said that someone helped him out once and he wanted to do the same."

It wasn't all fun and games, but Marlene turned setbacks into learning opportunities. "Our main US buyer went bankrupt—over 120 shops," she says. "We didn't lose any money because we were insured. But it made us realize that we had to start producing something that wasn't just a music box doll, as the industry was on a downward swing. It made us stronger and put us on the road to making hand-crafted wooden dolls."

Her company landed a contract to make limited edition dolls for the Marie Osmond Collectible Doll line that sold for \$1,000 each. "They sold 30 of them in 15 minutes and had a waiting list for 40 more who wanted them."

"Your business will consume your life," says Marlene. "You have to be willing to give up a lot and it's important that your passion for the business is greater than your need for free time."

*"The option of working for the government for the rest of my life didn't look glorious, so I went into self-employment."*

“When you first start a business everyone can tell you why you shouldn't do it. It is a good thing for you to hear”

[www.bpwabbotsfordmission.ca](http://www.bpwabbotsfordmission.ca)

**Business & Professional Women's Club**  
PO Box 644, Abbotsford, BC



A member of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the Abbotsford/Mission Chapter, established in 1987, "links businesses and professional women across Canada to provide support for and recognition of their achievements and to work toward equality of opportunity and economic security for all women." Meeting monthly, the Chapter seeks to develop the leadership capabilities and self confidence needed for members' career advancement through networking, self-development workshops and guest speakers. The Chapter hosts a "Woman of the Year" award event, provides two educational bursaries and advocates on behalf of women's issues.

[www.nwnw.biz](http://www.nwnw.biz)

**New Westminster Networking Women**  
Suite 375, 104 1015 Columbia Street, New Westminster, BC



The primary objective of New Westminister Networking Women is to "provide a positive networking environment to establish the links, friendships and contacts necessary to be fully effective in the business world." Founded in 1990 and serving New Westminister, networking, mentoring and workshops are offered in addition to an on-line business directory. Meeting weekly, attendees have the opportunity to develop and exercise their skills with a membership that includes over 90% business owners. A focus on both the social and educational aspects of business has been successful for NWNW, attracting long-term, active members.

[www.valleywomensnetwork.com](http://www.valleywomensnetwork.com)

**Valley Women's Network**  
Abbotsford, BC



Established in 1981, Valley Women's Network currently has 10 Chapters that serve the Fraser Valley, from Abbotsford to Vancouver, including an evening chapter. The Network's mission is to "promote the interest of women through networking, education and friendship." Mentoring programs and networking opportunities, as well as monthly guest speakers allow the 700 active members, 95% of whom own a business, to access a diverse set of business experiences.

Valley Women's Network is involved in the community supporting local women's transition homes, and youth, through programs for student teen mothers, annual bursaries for students and for girls aged 4 to 18. Members enjoy reduced rates for events and access to an on-line business directory. A monthly newsletter allows members to stay informed about events and programs.

Local Chapters operate in the following communities: Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Langley, Maple Ridge, Mission, Surrey/Delta, Tri City, Vancouver, White Rock as well as an evening chapter located in Cloverdale.



**SWAN – Successful Women Always Network**  
North Vancouver, White Rock, BC

[www.swannetwork.com](http://www.swannetwork.com)

SWAN is committed “to empower women, both personally and professionally, through the opportunities that networking provides,” by bringing together a diverse group of professional women, offering a welcoming environment for sharing common career and social concerns as well as educational seminars. Founded in 1994, SWAN has monthly breakfast meetings, held on Monday in White Rock and Thursday in North Vancouver, featuring guest speakers and networking. SWAN is a founding sponsor of the “Women of Excellence” Awards, supports the North Shore Women’s Centre and helps fundraise for local charities.



**Women of Whistler**  
c/o Whistler Chamber of Commerce, 201 – 4230 Gateway Drive, Whistler, BC

[www.womenofwhistler.com](http://www.womenofwhistler.com)

Founded in 1995, Women of Whistler is committed to “providing opportunities for local businesswomen to network, gain knowledge and share ideas in a friendly, relaxed environment.” Serving the Sea to Sky corridor, WOW has over 350 active members, meeting five evenings per year. As host of the annual “Dazzle and Deliver” and Spring Conference Networking events, WOW connects local businesswomen with a variety of educational and social opportunities to develop their careers and business. Members receive event and other information via email blasts. Also WOW supports young women in the community with a scholarship.

“The turning point for me was when I realized the power of networking and what can be accomplished when you become actively involved in an organization.”

*Sue Adams, Bevendale Enterprises Inc.*





## Vancouver

Axelsson, Tracey .....	88	Murphy, Amber .....	97
Bonner, Sarah .....	89	Negris, Cybele .....	98
Clark, Tamara .....	90	Rivera MacGregor, Elena .....	99
Feirin, Janet .....	91	Tatarin, Danielle .....	100
Hedbaut, Christine .....	91	Varadarajulu, Chindi .....	101
Joyce, Lori .....	104	Vasiljevic, Biljana .....	102
Ketler, Lorna .....	92	Walker, Amy .....	103
Legris, Teena .....	93	White, Heather .....	104
Lohan, Selena .....	94	Wilkins, Barb .....	92
Miles, Sandra .....	95	Wilson, Danielle .....	105
Moshurchak, Sara .....	96	Yang, Chanel .....	106



“A leader is someone who can quickly find simple solutions to complex problems”

## Tracey Axelsson

THE CO-OPERATIVE AUTO NETWORK  
205 470 GRANVILLE STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.685.1393 | [www.cooperativeauto.net](http://www.cooperativeauto.net)

Tracey Axelsson says she was driven to launch her business by the desire to contribute to a better environment. As the first-of-its-kind in the English-speaking world, the Co-operative Auto Network laid the groundwork for car sharing in North America.

Tracey had the idea for the business in 1995 and launched in 1997 with two cars and sixteen members. “My husband and I had to take out \$50,000 in personal loans and received another \$40,000 in grants,” Tracey says.

“I thought everyone in Vancouver would be car sharing by now, but they’re not,” she laughs. “Reality bites.” Still, the co-op has grown to include 5,000 members.

Since starting the business, Tracey says, “I don’t recognize the life I used to have. I can moderately remember having time to cycle to work and going to the gym, going to work, getting things done and going home.” With two small children, she rarely gets to the gym now. “When I get to work I have 20 things on a hotplate that have to be done and it’s all me. I work 40 to 60 hours a week.”

Tracey believes a leader needs to approach things in the spirit of kindness, to have a good sense of humour, to

see the positive and to be innovative. “Don’t approach a problem as a problem,” she suggests. “Look at it as a way to better the situation.”

She is inspired by former BC Lt. Governor Iona Campagnolo. “She amazes me because she has such a great ability to communicate,” Tracey says. “She has strong ethics and grace under fire. She never deviates from her principles.”

Tracey thinks all entrepreneurs have to be slightly crazy, driven by their dreams and believe in what they are doing. But they need to be practical, too. “Don’t go into business with a spouse, a friend or someone you barely know,” she advises. “Do it yourself and hire people.”

*“We’ve been very successful but it’s a hard slog every day.”*

# Sarah Bonner

VANCOUVER SCHOOL OF BODYWORK AND MASSAGE  
230 220 CAMBIE STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.688.5060 | [www.vsbm.com](http://www.vsbm.com)



Entrepreneurship is a risk worth taking – you just have to take your time and ensure it is the right risk for you. That was Sarah Bonner's belief when she was working as a spa therapist/masseuse. She considered opening her own spa but after crunching the numbers she realized the risk wasn't worth it. Instead, she decided to teach people how to work in a spa.

Sarah began writing a business plan late in 2002. After a number of drafts and refinements, she submitted it to Women's Enterprise Centre, received a start-up loan and opened the Vancouver School of Bodywork and Massage (VSBM) in February 2004.

"I learned I was pregnant with my first child as I was opening the school," she says. Although she was quite panicked at the thought of having a child and starting a business at the same time, she says she had a lot of support from her husband. The business was successful right out of the gate. Now, the school has well over 200 graduates and a staff of 25.

"VSBM does a body/mind integration program as well as yoga," says Sarah. "Students go through a lot of personal and professional development. I'm always astounded

by the fact that it is more than a school; it has become a community," she says. "It's become its own entity separate from me."

Sarah's role model is Colleen Fraser, founder of Vida Wellness Spa in Whistler, whose very successful business operation has now expanded throughout BC and the US. "She operates from a place of integrity," says Sarah, "and she has been involved in the business for a long time and still makes sure people are happy."

"For me, success is when you can achieve happiness in all aspects of your life," says Sarah. She is proud of the fact that she has managed to run the business while raising two children.

Sarah says anyone considering starting a business should be sure to write a solid business plan.

*"It's not just about the bottom line."*

“Only hire people you would enjoy having a meal with”



## Tamara Clark

OBJECT DESIGN WEARABLE ART GALLERY  
SUITE 4, 1551 JOHNSTON STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.683.7763 | [www.objectdesigngallery.com](http://www.objectdesigngallery.com)

When Tamara Clark began designing custom jewellery there weren't many women in the jewellery manufacturing industry. But she was naturally attracted to being her own boss and creating one-of-a-kind jewellery was her passion.

She started slowly, working nights as a bartender, until she built up a collection of jewellery and custom designs as well as clientele on the manufacturing side.

"I had to do a lot of private shows and craft fairs," she says. When she opened her first store in 2000 she got a loan from the bank and her brother helped with construction and renovation.

"After that, I went to Women's Enterprise Centre in 1999 with a more focused plan on what we wanted to do," she says. "From there the company mushroomed into the gallery we have today." Today, her business, Object Design Wearable Art Gallery, is one of the finest shops on Vancouver's Granville Island. "We have 1,800 square feet of hand-crafted jewellery from over 100 artists," she says. "The gallery is a great location because we get tons of tourists here, plus all the locals come down." Tamara designs her jewellery in a studio upstairs.

She advises potential entrepreneurs to: "Learn to delegate and make sure you're on the ball all the time. You need to hone your management skills in order to be prepared for growth."

"I struggle with being a leader every day," says Tamara. "I have to make myself approachable and sit and listen to other people's opinions. It's important to show respect for your staff, your suppliers and your clients."

Tamara says she has learned a lot about herself and about business and stress. "I'm much more confident now because I started with nothing and built up a viable business that, hopefully, one day I can sell and then retire," she says. "I'm proud of myself for what I've done and I've accomplished a lot of things I thought I would never accomplish."

*"Learn to delegate and make sure you're on the ball all the time."*

“Get a good  
accountant and have a  
good  
business plan”

# Janet Féirín & Christine Hedbaut

THE SPELT BAKERY

2141 EAST HASTINGS STREET, VANCOUVER, BC

604.258.2726 | www.thespeltbakery.ca

A car accident that prevented Janet Féirín from returning to her job forced her to take a good hard look at her life and her career options. What she found was a recipe for a successful business.

For years, she had been baking for family and friends using spelt flour and realized there's a lot of dough to be made from bread, especially these days with people looking for wheat-free products.

Spelt Bakery products debuted at the East Vancouver Farmers' Market. By December 1998, Janet opened a retail bakery on Nanaimo Street in Vancouver. Recently the bakery moved to an even larger location on Hastings Street.

It was the first bakery to offer spelt baked goods on a retail and wholesale level and the only exclusively spelt bakery in Canada.

Over the past 10 years, Janet's vision has changed from offering foods to people with allergies to offering good bread to the world.

Janet says she had no money when she started the business and tried everywhere to get a loan. Women's

Enterprise Centre came through financially and also helped her with her business plan.

"Before the bakery I did financial management for housing co-ops, non-profits and small businesses," says Janet. "Having a background in accounting is a huge asset to running a business." She says entrepreneurs also need obstinacy, courage and they need to know when to ask for help.

Changing careers is not the only way Janet's life has been transformed by this business. She has recently taken on a partner, Christine Hedbaut, who is known as 'the rebel chef'. "I have found someone I can actually work with", says Janet.

For inspiration, Janet credits her two mothers. "They started their own business when I was growing up," she says. "They gave me the security to know I could do whatever I wanted." Janet has published a cookbook called *Basic Spelt – Baking with an Ancient Grain*, "so you can 'bake what you knead'."

*"Having a background in accounting is a huge asset to running a business."*



Aura McKay

“Success is sometimes just about the tiny things in life that make you happy... taking pleasure in the small things in life like pleasing a customer”



## Lorna Ketler & Barb Wilkins

BODACIOUS ...CLOTHING TO CELEBRATE YOUR CURVES!  
4393 MAIN STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.874.2811 | [www.bodacious.ca](http://www.bodacious.ca)

“Whether you are an entrepreneur, a leader or an employee, you must have a sense of humour. If you aren’t having fun, go do something else”

Who says fashion stops at a certain size? Lorna Ketler and Barb Wilkins think that all women should be able to celebrate their curves with beautiful fashions. The cousins decided to do something about the fact that there were no fun, pretty clothes available for people their size. They launched Bodacious – Clothing to Celebrate Your Curves in Vancouver in October 2000.

Their mandate is to have sexy, fun clothing without marginalizing the shopping experience. The store is very body positive and encourages customers to rethink their image. “It’s not that my body is too big, but rather this skirt’s too small for my bodacious butt,” says Lorna.

Bodacious is different from other stores because they use local designers for their retail operation. They also manufacture their own “Bodacious” clothing line which they sell in their store and wholesale to other stores across Canada. A pair of jeans they manufactured was recently featured in New York’s In Style magazine.

Barb has a background in retail fashion and was running a preschool business. Lorna’s background was in sales, event planning and non-profits. They started out with a \$5,000 loan and \$5,000 in credit, selling consignment

goods. After two and a half years, they stopped selling pre-owned clothing and expanded their designer line.

“I’m really proud of what we’ve done,” says Barb. “Being my own boss has been huge.”

To future entrepreneurs she advises: “Find something that nobody else is doing. If you can find a niche and it is underserved — do it better.”

“Do your homework,” agrees Lorna. “Research the competition and learn the ins and outs of the daily aspects of running a business. Make the commitment and jump in. Get inspiration from those that have made it, not just from the ones that will give you doom and gloom.”

“We never envisioned what we have now,” says Lorna. “It’s bigger than any dream we had,” Barb adds. “When we started listening to our customers, the business took off with a life of its own.”

*“It’s not that my body is too big – it’s this skirt’s too small for my bodacious butt.”*

# Teena Legris

NIMA'MA MATERNITY INC.  
2938 WEST 4TH AVENUE, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.734.8800 | www.nimama.ca

Teena Legris opened Nima'ma Maternity in April 2008, a high end boutique that offers pre- and post-maternity apparel, organic skin care and cosmetics, jewellery and accessories. Teena was inspired to open Nima'ma during her pregnancy as she found it difficult to buy attractive, quality maternity apparel in Vancouver.

The name "Nima'ma" means "My Mother" in her birth mother's Woodland Cree dialect. Teena feels the name reveres motherhood and the environment, as the store also carries many organic products. The concept behind Nima'ma is to create a versatile and beautiful wardrobe celebrating maternal femininity. It has also been well-received by women who aren't pregnant and by those wanting to find quality organic apparel collections such as local designer Lav & Kush.

As a first-time mother, Teena experienced her share of challenges during the process of opening Nima'ma including project financing rejections, real estate agents scoffing at her business viability, health problems and the collapse of a business partnership.

Through perseverance and a strong conviction in her business concept, Teena won second place at the Small Business BC Business Plan Competition in February 2008 and with her family's support, Teena opened for business 18 months later.

Nima'ma's unique interior is designed for families and replicates the clean lines of an art gallery with crisp, white decor with two "Nima'ma green" accent walls, spacious high ceilings and custom built white displays. Two extra large dressing rooms were designed to accommodate strollers and a customer-accessible washroom next to the dressing rooms includes a built-in change table and wipes. For toddlers, the colourful blocks offer some playful distractions so that mothers may shop for clothes.

Teena admits that her aunt Celine, who owns Celine Interiors and helped design the inside of Teena's store, was a strong female role model. "She's an intelligent woman who has always conveyed a strong sense of confidence and creativity. I knew at six years of age that I not only wanted to have her sense of style but to one day develop a smart and tenacious perspective like her in my personal and business life. She and my uncle have both been instrumental in offering their support in my personal and business growth which is an incredible gift."

*"I've never worked so hard in my life but I'm proud to say that the feedback and response from families across Canada and abroad have made it all worthwhile."*



Adrienne Thiessen, Gemini Visuals

“If you truly believe in your business concept and back it up with a strong business plan and financials - and have the drive to make it succeed - you can and will make it happen”



“I didn’t really have a plan. I went to my boss and said “I have to quit and start my own business” she said, ‘Good for you’”

## Selena Lohan

MIMIC BABY SIGN LANGUAGE

109 1035 PACIFIC STREET, VANCOUVER, BC

604.687.0425 | [www.mimicbaby.com](http://www.mimicbaby.com)

Selena Lohan credits her burgeoning business to “falling for the cute deaf guy at work. I ended up marrying him and having two children.”

She says her idea to teach parents how to ‘talk’ with their babies long before they actually develop speech came to her as a result of that union. Selena developed Mimic Baby Sign Language in 2002 while she was pregnant with the couple’s first child. “It hit me like a gong on my head,” she says. “I realized that if I would pay \$250 for a prenatal class, just think what people would pay to be able to ‘talk’ to their children before they could talk.”

The company produces a program that gives parents the gift of early communication with their babies through sign language.

During her pregnancy, Selena researched materials on how to communicate with her child if he/she was born deaf. “Everything they sent was bland and clinical. I recreated the wheel to make it fun, entertaining, baby-centered and added the parenting perspective.” Mimic Baby Sign Language is the first registered sign language business in Canada.

“Originally it was going to be just live workshops and now it’s DVDs and live shows, and in the future, web shows and TV,” she says. “We have become very good at entertaining and engaging all babies whether they’re hearing babies, special needs babies, deaf babies, or autistic children and their parents.” The Mimic Baby DVD was included in the Academy Awards gift baskets last year.

Today, she says, she works more than she ever did. “I used to complain about work, but I don’t now. I am following my bliss.”

Her advice for starting up a business: “Assemble your dream team,” she says. “Gather friends, family to help with websites, shipping, creating and being involved in your business, any talent they have—if they want to help, let them.”

*“Delegate from day one.”*

# Sandra Miles

MILES EMPLOYMENT GROUP LTD.  
2480 1055 GEORGIA STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.694.2500 | www.miles.ca



Sandra Miles' attention to detail has helped her company adapt to changing times and achieve success. "This has been a very planned company," says Sandra. "We are a husband and wife team and spent six months planning what the business would look like."

Although Sandra had a similar business for fifteen years previously, when they started up Miles Employment Group Ltd. in 2003, they harnessed new technologies such as the web. "We were one of the first. Even five years ago people were not doing on-line testing and we were."

Sandra says, "It's interesting starting a business the second time around. You think you know it all. It's been more challenging than anticipated, as the landscape of the staffing business is in transition."

Sandra has had to adapt to changing demographics that affect her and every other business. Baby boomers are taking early retirement and not a lot of people are coming into the workforce. Unemployment is at its lowest rate in 30 years. "People now coming into the marketplace to work aren't as loyal—they stay for one or two years instead of five or ten. This has challenged us to employ innovative recruitment methods and increase our efforts to educate our clients of new employment trends" she says.

It's switched to an employee-driven marketplace. With the Olympics coming to Vancouver, there have been a lot of companies in the industry opening up shop here. "We've had to implement new client programs to ensure client loyalty," she says.

"In 2005 we were thrilled to be successful in responding to a request for proposals for placement agency services for VANOC. We have been working with them since then, supplying permanent, temporary and contract staffing solutions," she says. "We've also been working with other clients like Canadian Tourism Commission, Community Living BC, Fluor Canada and the Government of Canada.

Sandra recommends entrepreneurs revisit their original business plan from time to time. "Use your business plan as a compass to ensure you stay on track as it's easy to get distracted and move out of your core business plan," she says. "You need to build an infrastructure that supports your business plan and you need to implement measured processes. Move to your strengths and hire to your weaknesses."

*"Use your business plan as a compass to ensure you stay on track."*

“Move to your strengths and hire to your weaknesses”



“The potential to grow is only limited by my ambition”

# Sara Moshurchak

GRANVILLE EYELAND FRAMEMAKERS  
15 1666 JOHNSTON STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.488.0909 | [www.granville-eyeland.com](http://www.granville-eyeland.com)

Sara Moshurchak is living her dream. When she was in college, she was inspired by a presentation, Klaus Sebok, owner of Granville Eyeland Framemakers, made to students. “I said to my friend, ‘I’m going to run his business one day,’ and nine years later here I am!” she says.

After graduating, Sara approached Sebok about employment and ended up working alongside him for seven years, first as an optician, moving up to manager and finally taking over the business in April 2008. As a retail optical store with an in-house lab, design studio and sight testing facilities, Granville Eyeland has established a niche by offering custom-made frames with a “made-in-Vancouver” cachet.

Years working in the business provided Sara with the needed experience, but when she went looking for financing to purchase it, she says it was hard to find a financier who really understood what a new business owner goes through. “Women’s Enterprise Centre looked at what I was doing more as an investment than a loan,” she says. “They have been flexible, understanding and very pleasant to deal with.”

She advises others interested in buying a business to

“just get started by getting your ideas on paper. With a good business plan, you can talk about the business with confidence and stay focused.” Sara also works with a retail consultant to help her set goals and objectives, manage inventory, stay on top of customer needs and wants and to provide objectivity with budgeting and cash flow.

The company’s business plan calls for expansion over the next few years with new marketing ideas and identifying ways to improve customer relations and grow the company brand. “We want to offer designs and other frames that are unique and individual and unlike anything our competition can offer,” Sara says.

And how does it feel to own the business finally? “Amazing,” Sara says. “The best part is being able to work ‘on’ the business as well as work in it. The decisions are mine to make and the potential for the business to grow is only limited by my ambition. What a thrilling thought!”

*“Get your ideas on paper. With a good business plan, you can talk about the business with confidence and stay focused.”*

# Amber Murphy

PURPLE DRAGON ACADEMY OF DON JITSU RYU  
2939 WEST 4TH AVENUE, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.737.2929 | www.purpledragon.ca

Sensei Amber Murphy is a trailblazer. When she began her martial arts school in 2002, she knew of only two other women in the world who had studios. “There are very few women that run martial arts studios independently,” says Amber, owner of Vancouver’s Purple Dragon Academy of Don Jitsu Ryu.

But at 22, she had already achieved her second degree black belt and was teaching at a community centre. She knew this was what she wanted to do full-time. Within a few months Amber researched, wrote her business plan and opened the school with the help of a small business loan from the Canadian Youth Business Foundation (CYBF). CYBF is a national, non-profit organization that assists young Canadian entrepreneurs with loans, mentoring and on-line services. Amber says, “Without the loan from CYBF it would have been difficult to open a full-time branch in Vancouver. It has been a great help.”

The Don Jitsu Ryu style was founded by Amber’s teacher, Professor Don Jacob, who she says is the most positive person she has ever met. “He teaches that quality comes first—always quality over quantity. ‘A rice tree grows fast but an oak tree grows slow and lasts a century.’ I founded

my Purple Dragon branch on that principle.”

Owning the school has meant a huge life change for Amber, who now works six to seven days a week. “The business has become my life,” she says. “It has enriched my life even more because I’ve been able to meet so many wonderful people who have become like family. Now I am much better at public speaking and my confidence has built up.”

“I now have a solid foundation and am able to look out into other areas to grow into,” says Amber. “Students from public schools come to visit us regularly for physical education and positive lectures. We recently started summer camps and look towards the future with new and innovative ideas.”

*“You have to love what you do if you want to succeed. It takes hard work, perseverance and commitment and if you don’t love it, it will never go from good to great.”*



Ute Snider

“A true leader is someone who is able to lead and to follow. In order to be a leader you have to be growing yourself”



## Cybele Negris

WEBNAMES.CA INC. /CBD CONSULTING LTD.  
3RD FLOOR – 322 WATER STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
866.221.7878 | [www.webnames.ca](http://www.webnames.ca)

Cybele Negris has fond memories of her first year in business. The Webnames.ca team was blazing a trail in a new industry — web domain registration — and it was exhilarating and exhausting at the same time. Her company grew so fast (she assembled a team of 30 people in 3 months and year one sales of \$2.5 million) that she rarely had time for more than two hours of sleep. Her employees often crashed at the office in their sleeping bags.

“Moving quickly was the only way to seize and take advantage of the opportunities in those early days of the Internet,” she says.

While doing contract work with the Industry Liaison Office at the University of British Columbia, Cybele met John Demco who founded and ran the dot-ca registry in the late 1980’s. With the rapid growth of domain registrations, Demco eventually handed the management of the dot-ca domain names over to the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) and Cybele was part of the team that oversaw the technology transfer.

She and her partners decided to start Webnames.ca Inc., which continues to rank as one of the top registrars accredited by CIRA.

Since those early days, Webnames.ca added new products and services. It now manages domain portfolios for 40,000 clients, including many of Canada’s Fortune 500 companies, government agencies and top law firms.

Cybele and her husband also own CBD Construction, which won a Gold Georgie home renovation award in 2006. Cybele made the Profit W100 list of Canada’s Top Women Entrepreneurs from 2004 to 2007.

Cybele also makes time to promote entrepreneurship in her community by giving frequent speeches, supporting community events and serving on numerous boards, including the FWE and Wired Woman.

With two young children at home, Cybele knows the balancing act many career women struggle with, a challenge she likens to going to entrepreneurial boot camp. “It takes a village to raise a child and it’s the same in business. In the end, everyone needs a village of support; you need a great team at work and a great team at home,” she says. “You can’t do it alone.”

*“The balancing act many career women struggle with is like going to entrepreneurial boot camp.”*

“You need a great team  
at work and a great team  
at home”

# Elena Rivera MacGregor

RIVERA DESIGN GROUP LTD.

204 910 RICHARDS STREET, VANCOUVER, BC

604.687.4420 | [www.riveradesign.com](http://www.riveradesign.com)

When Elena Rivera MacGregor created Rivera Design she decided it would differ from the typical graphic design house. “We don’t just do great design for our clients; we create connections. It’s those connections that make a sale and grow a business. It’s about creating business strategies and how web and graphic design support business growth,” Elena says.

Elena has a diploma in fine arts with a major in graphic design. Her father was a successful entrepreneur so she understood that way of life and never had any fear of going out to work on her own. She started her own company in 1991, slowly. Her first client was referred to her from a former boss. Then there were two projects and Elena was able to pay the rent and save a bit. “Eventually you don’t have to inch away at it,” she says.

“My life used to be pretty chaotic at the beginning of the business,” Elena recalls. “At first you have to grow and you have to do everything. When you break through to the next level you can actually get more people involved, hire employees and become more organized. Then you finally reach the final level where you own the business and the business doesn’t own you.”

“You need to have a network around you to help you,” says Elena. “Find people you can ask questions of. The more mentors and resources you have around you the easier it is to weather owning a business.”

Rivera Design Group Ltd. won the national Vancouver 2010 Olympic Emblem Design Competition. Elena is recognized on an international level, as a leader in her industry. She has been invited to speak to a variety of audiences including a design conference in Mexico. “I was mingling and networking with top graphic designers from around the world,” she says.

“It’s been quite the journey since the days when my primary goal was to pay the rent,” says Elena. “My life is happy and balanced. I’ve put in my time and now I get to reap the benefits.”

*“I started by just paying my rent—  
doing one project at a time.”*



Elizabeth Soergel

“The more mentors and resources you have around you the easier it is to weather owning a business”



“Being a woman trying to make a difference sets me apart”

## Danielle Tatarin

DESIGNER COCKTAIL COMPANY  
900 555 BURRARD STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
800.961.0249 | [www.designercocktail.com](http://www.designercocktail.com)

Danielle Tatarin is known as a cocktail maven. Through her business, Designer Cocktail Company, she draws on that expertise and love of everything cocktail related to create specialty products and design new drinks. “I also educate on the history of cocktails,” she says. “It’s more about the whole experience of cocktails and raising the level of cocktails.”

Danielle says she always wanted to have her own business and that she was inspired by her great, great grandmother, Christina Shewchuk, who came to Canada from the Ukraine with hopes and dreams, stood in an empty field and created a home and a livelihood. “My uncle still lives on the homestead to this day.”

Her first company, West Coast Garnish Girls, opened in 2003 and won the Canadian Youth Business Foundation Best Business BC Award. When her two business partners wanted to move in other directions, the company was dissolved and Danielle opened her new business in January 2008. “My clients range from restaurants to private home owners who have their own bar,” she says.

“In the beginning I worked part-time while running the business, so I’ve definitely gone through some hardship

with trying to get funding,” says Danielle. “It always seems to cost more than you expect.”

Danielle is beginning to get bigger contracts and orders with the new company, which took just under a year to launch. “I didn’t think I would have any partners, but now I am open to bringing people into the company and creating employment opportunities for other people,” Danielle says. She is also considering expanding on-line with webinars, consulting and travelling to clients.

Danielle’s advice to others who want to follow their dream of entrepreneurship: “Be prepared to work harder than working for someone else. Don’t be afraid of failure; be prepared for the unexpected. Have a clear business plan with funding in place and find a mentor.”

*“It’s great being your own boss and making your own hours but you have to buckle down to get things done.”*

# Chindi Varadarajulu

CHUTNEY VILLA SOUTH INDIAN CUISINE  
147 EAST BROADWAY, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.872.2228 | [www.chutneyvilla.com](http://www.chutneyvilla.com)

Fear didn't stop Chindi Varadarajulu from leaving her home and family to start a new life in Canada in 1996, so it certainly wasn't going to stop her from realizing her dream of opening a restaurant.

"Fear just wastes energy and time," says Chindi. She decided she didn't have either to waste. "I'd lost my job managing a restaurant, had all these debts and was so afraid, but I never let fear get in my way."

Chindi approached a number of financial institutions for start-up funds, but they turned her down as a high risk because she lacked a business background. Women's Enterprise Centre recognized that her industry experience and her business plan was solid, so within six days she had the loan.

Chutney Villa South Indian Cuisine was born and was the first restaurant in Vancouver that serves South Indian food. "In the beginning it was not a good thing because people didn't recognize the items on the menu," says Chindi. "The difference is huge; there is no dairy at all in South Indian food. The dishes can contain up to 15 types of spices."

Traffic was slow at first, but in May 2004, five months after she had opened, the Georgia Straight reviewed her restaurant and business has been booming ever since.

"We treat our patrons like guests in our home," says Chindi. "All the recipes are handmade daily. Everything is cooked to order. Everything is fresh. Everything that goes out is tasted by the cook," she adds; "I would not be where I am today if not for my team."

As a side business, Chindi acts as a culinary tour guide, hosting clients on an all-inclusive two-week tour through two or three states in South India. They visit markets and Chindi teaches them how to make South Indian dishes. They do "a lot of fun stuff" in between.

*"My mother is my inspiration and her strength is amazing."*



“I'd lost my job, had all these debts and was so afraid, but I never let fear get in my way... fear just wastes energy and time”



“Life happens no matter what and I’ve adapted to that with my business”

## Biljana Vasiljevic

EXHIBIT CRE8IVE

105 WEST 3RD AVENUE, VANCOUVER, BC

877.899.4074 | [www.exhibitcreative.com](http://www.exhibitcreative.com)

With a background in mechanical engineering, an MBA and experience in all aspects of trade shows, Biljana Vasiljevic had a wealth of career options. Prior to starting Exhibit Cre8ive in 2004, she had worked in different management positions from purchasing, production, to sales management and in different industries—food, medical, high-tech—but she yearned to be her own boss.

She created a business plan for a condiment packaging company, but once it was on paper she realized it wouldn’t work. She decided to switch her focus and put together a plan for a display and trade show business. She presented it to Women’s Enterprise Centre and received a start-up loan.

“Exhibit Cre8ive is unique in the industry, as we offer a much larger selection of products for any exhibiting needs. Plus, we partner with our clients and provide marketing solutions for them,” says Biljana. “We don’t just create displays; we create marketing plans as well.”

“My father was a big influence in my life,” says Biljana, who was born in the former Yugoslavia. “He was an entrepreneur himself and had a few businesses when

I was growing up. Becoming an entrepreneur was a normal thing for me.”

“When you build a business, you have to be very flexible because of economic, market, personal and geographical influences. You have to be able to adapt your business to your clients.”

Biljana, who recently became a mother, says: “Life happens no matter what and I’ve adapted to that with my business. I’ve built a good team around me so that when I need the time to be with my family, they are able to run the business with minimal supervision.”

Her vision for the business hasn’t changed much in the past four years. “The experience I’ve gained has given me a better understanding of strategies and how to implement them,” she says. “Financially the business is doing better than expected which was a very pleasant surprise.”

*“Everything doesn’t go as planned.”*

# Amy Walker

MOMENTUM MAGAZINE

24 425 CARRALL STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.669.9850 | [www.momentumplanet.com](http://www.momentumplanet.com)

Amy Walker is a rider at heart. It was her love of cycling that propelled her to launch Momentum Magazine in 2001.

“The magazine is a reflection of people who ride bikes for transportation... a lifestyle magazine for those who love to ride,” she says. “It’s focused on people, issues and ideas in the cycling world. Other magazines are more focused on the sports, mechanics and the gear associated with riding. Momentum also is a magazine which appeals to women – an underserved market in cycling”

“Part of the reason I started the magazine was for a creative outlet,” says Amy. “I am now able to realize the creative ideas that I have and that’s not something I could do before.”

And what a ride it has been.

Although started as a non-profit, Amy re-launched the magazine as a business in May 2005. “When we first started, there wasn’t a lot of precedent for what we were doing, so we had to educate the advertisers and clients,” she says. “We started with basically no money. We had enough to print the magazine. Initially we asked

individuals for \$100 each and printed their names in the magazine.”

In August 2007, the magazine went from newsprint to glossy paper, giving it a more professional look. In January 2008, they increased distribution to 14 North American cities and featured Lance Armstrong on the cover of the May/June edition.

For the past two years, the magazine’s focus has been on bikes and Amy says that will expand in the future to become more holistic in nature, covering other aspects of self-propelled transport.

Amy is inspired by Carmen Mills, a former partner in Momentum while it was a non-profit entity and a previous publisher of Spoke’N’Word. “She was great at rallying people and getting them involved in positive cultural endeavours,” she says.

*“I talk about work all the time now because I love it.”*



Talia Fanning

“Put your dreams down on paper in the form of a business plan”



“It’s not about being a woman; it’s about being in business and making it happen. Your sex has nothing to do with it.”

## Lori Joyce & Heather White

CUPCAKES BY HEATHER AND LORI  
2887 WEST BROADWAY, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.974.300 | [www.originalcupcakes.com](http://www.originalcupcakes.com)

Friends since the age of fifteen, Heather White and Lori Joyce had always talked about starting a business together. In 2001, they came across a bakery in New York that made cupcakes from their extra batter and Heather noticed that everyone leaving the bakery carried out cupcakes. She tried to convince Lori to open a “cupcakes only” bakery in Vancouver but Lori didn’t think it would work, so it went on the back burner.

A few months later, they were out running and noticed a place for rent. Lori reconsidered the plan and the rest, as they say, is history.

Lori and Heather had the first cupcake bakery in North America. “They are everywhere now, but before we opened there weren’t bakeries that sold just cupcakes.”

They started with a single store in 2002, focusing heavily on the brand to give it a 1950’s feel. “We always hoped we would have more than one location but the goal for the first year was to just get through it,” says Lori. “We had so many people enquiring about franchising since we opened, but we had to look at our organization and work things out first.” After their third store opened smoothly, they decided they were ready to franchise. “It

is more reliable to find owner/operators than it is to find a store manager,” she says. “It’s also a fast way to grow the concept.”

“When we first started, we just made cupcakes,” says Heather. “Now we are working on cupcake recipes and mixes to sell in the stores. We are also creating Cupcakes brand candles, recycled bags, gift boxes, gift bags, cookies, packaged candies and paper plates.” And they have expanded to sell other baked goods as well, all with the Cupcakes branding. “We also do wholesale and corporate sales, but retail is still our main focus,” adds Lori.

Both appreciate the strong support they received from their families, crediting Lori’s mother-in-law with some solid business advice: “Don’t look at yourself as different because you’re a woman.”

*“Too many people take all of their time pondering the idea. You need to step out of your own personal comfort zone and do something different every day.”*

# Danielle Wilson

THE SWEET PEANUT CLOTHING COMPANY INC.  
2 156 WEST 14TH AVENUE, VANCOUVER, BC  
888.617.4465 | www.sweetpeanut.com

Curious, excited by surprises, loves learning and figuring things out – these characteristics could describe a baby or toddler, but they just as easily apply to an entrepreneur. Maybe that’s why Danielle Wilson was able to cultivate those traits into a wildly successful clothing company for babies.

With a background in marketing and sales, Danielle had been working in the advertising industry when she realized she didn’t work with any other moms. “The work didn’t lend itself to family life,” she says, so she started to look for something different. Attracted to self-employment, she knew she could build any brand and sell it.

“There is a spectrum that baby clothes fall in,” says Danielle Wilson. “There are basics that aren’t very fashionable and then there are mini-adult clothes that aren’t practical. The world around babies is becoming more of a style extension of ourselves than it was before. I saw an opportunity, and I seized it.”

Planning for Sweet Peanut Clothing began in July 2005. By September she was taking her first orders and she started shipping them out in February 2006.

“When I first started, I think I really wanted to start a small business with manageable growth,” she says. “I forgot that I was ambitious. I’m not the kind of person to say no to opportunities when they present themselves. My slow manageable growth business is now exporting across North America, the UK, Europe and Australia.” Her once small business now has a clientele of celebrity babies including Shiloh Nouvel Jolie-Pitt and Violet Affleck.

“Working for myself has been a new experience for me,” says Danielle. “It may not feel like you are in control of your life when you are counting inventory at one in the morning, but you are. It’s really wonderful to be building something.”

Her advice for potential entrepreneurs is to have a plan, keep it simple and keep focused. “It’s essential to have lots of good ideas but you need a plan,” she says. “Success is when you know what your plan is and then you make it happen.” “Make sure you have a diverse client base,” she adds.

*“A leader needs to know how to make their vision visual.”*



Alfonso Arnold

“I feel more like this is something I should be doing and my life has more purpose”



## Chanel Yang

L'AMOUR DU VIN/CANADIAN CORNER  
906 989 NELSON STREET, VANCOUVER, BC  
604.727.3571

“People told me I had no idea how hard it was to start a business, but that only made me more determined”

Chanel Yang was ready for the business world long before she even dreamed about owning her own company. As a young girl, “my parents and I would have weekly meetings and I had to account for what I had learned since the last one and what I was going to improve on,” she recalls. Although not always pleasant, Chanel admits these meetings provided some invaluable lessons about the importance of preparation and accountability to oneself and one’s partners.

When the university grad moved from Shanghai to Canada, she was motivated rather than daunted by the challenges of adapting to a new language and culture. She soon landed a position as an accountant with a large consulting company, but the burning desire to have her own business simmered below the surface.

Finally, after considerable research into various opportunities, she left her job and opened a winemaking business in Vancouver with partner, Mike Donovan. “People told me I was crazy, that I had no idea how hard it was to start a business, but that only made me more determined,” Chanel recalls.

Chanel’s business plan for L’Amour du Vin won a province-

wide competition from Small Business BC. The business grew quickly and in 2005, it won the Vancouver Courier’s Readers’ Choice Award for the Best Microbrewery, followed by international medals for its wines.

This public recognition of both quality and service represented success to Chanel, but the personal growth she had experienced was just as important. “You need to know your industry and your market, but you also have to know yourself,” she says. “I’ve learned that I am very motivated in the face of adversity and success to me is really about continually growing and learning.”

Chanel and Mike (now her husband), sold the winemaking business in 2007 and with four other partners, Chanel is currently preparing for her next venture, Canadian Corner, which will export selected Canadian products to China. Chanel believes, “As long as you are motivated and determined, you can do anything.”

*“You need to know your industry and your market, but you also have to know yourself.”*



**Association of Women Business Owners**  
604.878.6699, 1000 355 Burrard Street, Vancouver, BC

[www.wbo.ca](http://www.wbo.ca)

Launched in 1978, the Association of Women Business Owners is committed to supporting and encouraging women entrepreneurs by providing networking opportunities, workshops, mentoring and fostering strategic alliances between members. The annual 'Women Entrepreneur's Retreat' weekend, currently in its 5th year, was created and is hosted by the Association. Meeting monthly eight times each year, members enjoy the 'Wize Women' speaker series as well as other business presentations. The association serves the entire Lower Mainland and posts current event information on its website.

**Chinese Women Entrepreneurs Association**  
604.222.9789, 905 1788 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC

Serving Greater Vancouver, the Chinese Women Entrepreneurs Association, created in 1996, is committed to bringing together Chinese businesswomen to help promote and support each other. Networking, mentoring and workshops allow members to raise the profile of their business within their community. With a focus on both social and educational opportunities, Chinese Women Entrepreneurs host an annual gala event in November as well as several luncheons throughout the year which feature guest speakers. Meeting every other month, members enjoy reduced rates for workshops and luncheons.



**Forum for Women Entrepreneurs**  
604.682.8115, 850 1095 West Pender Street, Vancouver, BC

[www.fwe.ca](http://www.fwe.ca)

Founded in 2003, with an active membership of 450, FWE has a mission to mentor and educate women entrepreneurs. A US branch and outreach programs in Paris and London make FWE an international network that offers mentorship programs, semi-annual roundtable events, a student internship program as well as an e-series program for high growth businesses. FWE hosts an annual gala in recognition of successful women entrepreneurs. Members, of whom 95% own businesses, have access to public relations and marketing support as well as a large directory of business experts.

“To lead is actually a behaviour choice - to look at what's required in any situation and decide to make a difference, in order to create a better outcome and cause change to happen.”

*Laurel Douglas, CEO Women's Enterprise Centre*





# Victoria & The Islands

Barnard, Angie .....	110	LaPointe, Michelle .....	120
de Laat, Anyes.....	111	Long, Kristina.....	121
Drew, Maureen .....	112	McArthur, Judy.....	112
Farthing, Tattney-Lee .....	113	Rourke, Leah .....	122
Grace, Julia & Susan.....	114	Schelini, Gerri .....	123
Helin, Leanne.....	115	Siochowicz, Theresa .....	124
Isherwood, Connie.....	116	Skelton, Pam.....	125
Johnson, Rhonda .....	117	Tremain, Leah .....	126
Johnston, Vivian .....	118	Turner, Ariana.....	127
Johnstone, Nat.....	119	Waters, Karen.....	128



Bruce Barnard

“Find a group of people who will help you move forward. Get your advocates and mentors behind you”

## Angie Barnard

PAINTED TURTLE GUESTHOUSE  
121 BASTION STREET, NANAIMO, BC  
250.753.4432 | [www.paintedturtle.ca](http://www.paintedturtle.ca)

What do you get when you combine a hotel, a bed and breakfast and an international hostel? The unique experience that is the Painted Turtle Guesthouse in Nanaimo.

Owner Angie Barnard’s vision was to create a ‘boutique hostel’ experience. “The comfort and service are what you would get at a hotel, but the extra amenities can’t be found anywhere but a hostel,” says Angie. For example, there is a shared kitchen, a games room, a lounge with a fireplace, a library and a place to do laundry.

Angie feels that she and her partner Bruce have raised the bar for the hostelling industry and that they have achieved success by meeting and exceeding their mission to provide affordable, lifestyle-oriented accommodation and by finding and retaining exceptional staff. They should know. The two came up with the idea after their own extensive round-the-world travel adventure. With her education in Tourism Management and his passion for renovating, they knew they found the perfect spot in Nanaimo to establish their concept. They opened in July 2004.

“At first we lived at the guesthouse and lived and

breathed the business 24/7,” says Angie. “We now own our own home and have hired a manager, so we have more separation between the business and our personal life.”

“Our vision for the guesthouse and operations has not changed,” says Angie, who feels it is important to be a part of her community. “We have two or three more business ideas we would love to get off the ground that would be complimentary to the guesthouse and tourism development.”

“An ex-boss of mine had a motto of ‘make it happen,’” says Angie. “I like that because issues come up and will be dealt with, so the focus is to make it better - not dwell on the problem.” She recommends entrepreneurs “surround themselves with ‘make it happen’ people... people who are of the same mindset as you.”

*“The first three years in business were very much heads down, bum up.”*

# Anyes de Laat

SOUL COMFORT SHEEPSKIN & LEATHER  
190 FOURTH STREET, DUNCAN, BC  
800.404.0622 | [www.soulcomfortsheepskin.com](http://www.soulcomfortsheepskin.com)

Anyes de Laat may have been forced to give up her dream of becoming a doctor 27 years ago, but this enterprising entrepreneur has found a unique way to help patients and make a valuable contribution to the field of medicine.

When Anyes' journey to medical school was interrupted in 1981 by a pregnancy, she drew on the sewing and patternmaking skills her mother taught her to produce sheepskin baby booties. "I started out literally piece by piece," she says, "one pair of booties at a time." She began making the booties for friends, then they told their friends and the business took off.

At first, Anyes was making products only from sheepskin. In 1998, her main supplier told her they had sold all their skins to China and there weren't any left to sell to her. While researching other suppliers she came across a wool fabric she thought would be suitable.

"My folks are both from Holland and lived through the war," says Anyes. "I heard more than once from them that if it wasn't for wool and sheepskins those soldiers would have never made it through those cold winters." Her research led her to a new discovery: sheepskin pads can alleviate bedsores.

When she realized 95 per cent of bedsores were preventable and that the medical system spends \$1.1 billion a year on bedsore treatment, she knew she had found an untapped market. She is currently launching her medical line of sheepskin pads across North America and she has a line of pet products as well.

Anyes says her creativity sets her apart from other sheepskin manufacturers and companies. "Other companies have taken designs from Australia," she says. "My line is completely designed by me, with input from my employees."

Anyes started out as a newlywed with two stepchildren, a new baby and no business background. Since then, she has moved on to a new marriage and has had two more children, all of them raised along with the business.

*"Don't give up. Things don't happen overnight."*



“Good thoughts today—  
good day tomorrow. Bad  
thoughts today—bad day  
tomorrow”



“There’s no other paycheque  
from somewhere else so I’m  
full on all the time”

## Maureen Drew & Judy McArthur

ARTISAN EDIBLES FINE FOOD COMPANY LTD.  
895 DICKINSON WAY, PARKSVILLE, BC  
250.248.0670 | [www.artisanedibles.com](http://www.artisanedibles.com)

When most people their age were thinking about retirement, Maureen Drew and Judy McArthur decided they would rather ‘re-fire’ their lives than retire. Maureen and Judy are 50/50 partners in Artisan Edibles Fine Food Company Ltd. and these two ‘seniorpreneurs’ are not about to slow down any time soon.

They first met 28 years ago and reconnected in 2003 when Maureen moved to Vancouver Island. Judy wanted to expand her home business, Artisan Preserves and Maureen, whose background is in marketing, was looking to introduce a product into the market.

They decided to combine their skills, established a partnership in July 2004 and Artisan Edibles Fine Food Company was born. They set up a commercial kitchen in Maureen’s home, had it approved and in November 2005, they launched their products in stores where specialty foods were sold.

“Most of what we manufacture is grown right on Vancouver Island and the products are inspired by what is available locally... unique products like wild rose and champagne jelly where you can actually see the rose petals floating in the jelly. We make preserves without

preservatives, everything is all natural,” says Judy.

Maureen and Judy financed their business with lines of credit. “Have capital behind you,” Maureen advises. “Financing is the most important thing. You need money to invest in your company and to live comfortably while you grow your business. A business plan will show you what you need to start and grow. Continually revisit your business strategy.”

The duo works 14 hours a day and usually seven days a week during the busy seasons, taking vacations during downtime. “I feel like I am continually multi-tasking with family and the business. Even at the end of the day I’m thinking about the big picture for the business while still being there for my family,” says Maureen.

Entrepreneurs have “that passion in your belly that makes you step out and take the risks,” says Judy. “I used to work full-time and have my small business on the side that I did on my own time. This is a totally different commitment.”

*“We’re re-firing our lives, not retiring.”*

# Tattney-Lee Farthing

VCM AUTO GROUP INC.

1750 GOVERNMENT STREET, VICTORIA, BC

250.386.7508 | [www.vcmauto.com](http://www.vcmauto.com)

Growing up a tomboy has been a huge benefit for Tattney-Lee Farthing. “I’ve always been attracted to work done traditionally by men. I loved being out in the garage puttering around with my dad,” she says. “My greatest strength is probably the ability to work in a male-dominated environment. I was always taught to believe in myself and that as long as you’re up for the challenge you can do anything.”

That trait, along with her exceptional customer service skills, has been a key factor in the success of VCM Auto Sales and Service in Victoria.

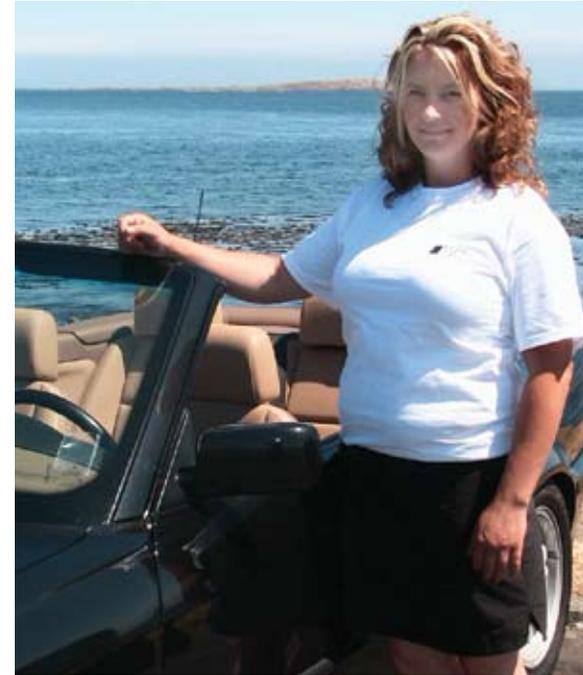
Tattney-Lee and husband Mark purchased the service side of the BMW dealership in 2000 and their client-service focus has attracted many new customers. After realizing that they were spending as much time providing advice on how to purchase the right vehicle as they were servicing cars for their customers, the couple decided to take over the sales lot as well.

Tattney-Lee left her job selling tools at a major department store to manage the Sales Department but hit a wall when she began the search for financing. She had no success with conventional banks and although private

funding was available, going that route would mean losing control of the business. When she approached Women’s Enterprise Centre, Tattney was walked through the loan procedure and became their first loan client in the automotive industry.

Tattney’s well-honed customer service skills which she credits to many years spent working in the retail industry, helped boost VCM’s customer base from 300 to more than 1,200 customers in eight years. With its exceptional growth, VCM Auto is preparing to go to the next level in its development by looking at eco-friendly business opportunities related to new products the dealership could carry and “greener” operational procedures. “In this age where automobile transportation is changing, our future depends on being innovative and leading edge, as well as providing the exceptional service we are known for,” she says.

*“Our future depends on being innovative and leading edge, as well as providing the exceptional service we are known for.”*



“My greatest strength is probably my ability to work in a male-dominated environment”



Desmond Gross

“Try and find a way to do the exploring before you get completely locked in”

## Julia & Susan Grace

MOONSTRUCK ORGANIC CHEESE INC.  
1306 BEDDIS ROAD, SALT SPRING ISLAND, BC  
250.537.4987 | [www.moonstruckcheese.com](http://www.moonstruckcheese.com)

Looking for independence, security and a pastoral way of life led partners Julia and Susan Grace to found Moonstruck Organic Cheese, Inc.

Located on beautiful Salt Spring Island, this small, valued-added farm operation offers a unique product to BC consumers. “There are only two other organic cheese makers in the province and one other artisan cheese maker,” says Julia, who manages the cheese plant while Susan manages the farm. “Good milk and old-fashioned cheese making help to make a fine product for a niche market.”

A rigid regulatory environment makes any cheese business quite expensive to operate. Julia and Susan have learned to make the business work economically for the size of the farm and the plant. Julia says they received some private financing and have just paid off the loan from Women’s Enterprise Centre which they used for a new building and to purchase and install new equipment. Now, after ten years, their business is finally in the black.

Julia advises potential entrepreneurs about the need for a strong commitment when owning a business. “I’ve had

one vacation in the past ten years,” she says. “I work at least six days a week and am completely immersed in this environment. I still like it but I wish it wasn’t quite as much work.”

She suggests: “Start slowly and try to think it out beforehand. Find a way to dip your toe in before diving in 100 per cent.”

Julia and Susan say their business is very intuitive and they have learned a lot about caring for cows organically and how to make cheese year round under changing economic and environmental conditions. But, Julia adds, “in some ways I wish I had had a role model because I feel we carved this vision of our business out of our own cloth.”

They hope that now they can be role models to help other women entrepreneurs. “We feel we have something to pass on now.”

*“It would be helpful if there was someone to go to who understood what we were doing.”*

# Leanne Helin

LEANNE HELIN TSIMSHIAN NATIVE JEWELLERY  
2700 LANA ROAD, NANOOSE BAY, BC  
250.468.9299 | [www.leannehelin.com](http://www.leannehelin.com)

Sometimes, it takes a bit of time and a little push to find your niche. Leanne Helin tried chef training and then worked in the fishing industry, before she found hers.

Coming back to work at her family's native art gallery in French Creek, her brother Bill, who was an artist, encouraged Leanne to try creating jewellery, even offering to help her learn the traditional Tsimshian form. "Being an urban Indian, I was far away from my homeland influences of the art," she says. "He helped me get back to my artistic roots and he was my teacher."

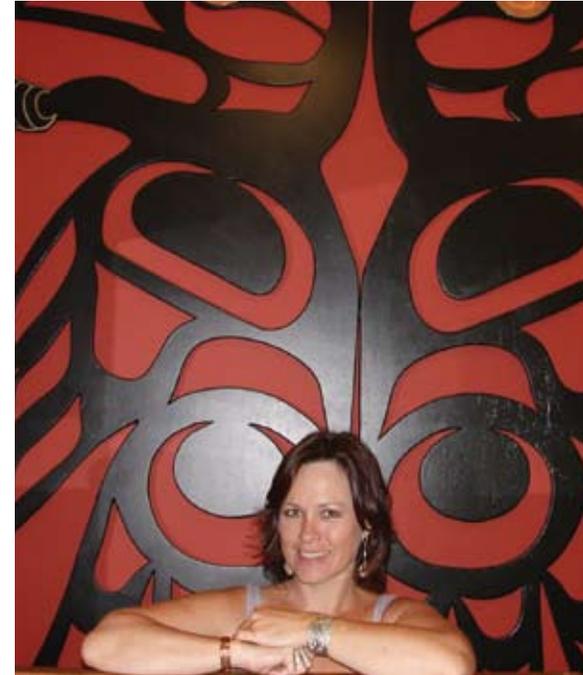
By 1987, Leanne thought she could make a business of it. "My parents were my stabilizers," says Leanne. With her family 100 per cent behind her, she completed a jewellery repair program in California and was in full production by 1989.

Leanne's business concept has matured over the years. "When I first started, I just did bulk orders with no thought of who they would go to," she says. "Then I realized the great rewards in doing custom orders and working one-on-one with people, so they feel empowered wearing a piece that I've made and created with them and for them."

Since starting the business, Leanne feels she has become more self-confident, both in her business and in her personal life. While the success of the business has allowed her to achieve creative and financial independence and bring pleasure to others through her creations, it has also provided an opportunity for her to be at home with her son.

Leanne believes entrepreneurs need perseverance, a strong belief in their abilities and faith in a higher power. While her family background pulled her into the business, Leanne didn't know if she had any artistic ability until her brother pushed her to making jewellery. "Try it all," she advises. "Seek every avenue to open up your areas of creativity."

*"There were not a lot of women doing native jewellery art then and there still aren't today."*



“Being self-employed is a struggle but it is such a rewarding gift: to be able to share your talent with others”



“An entrepreneur has a good business head with vision and stamina and ability to see things accomplished”

## Connie Isherwood

HOLMES AND ISHERWOOD  
1190 FORT STREET, VICTORIA, BC  
250.383.7157

Connie Isherwood, nee Holmes, has been leading her field for more than 55 years. In 1951, when she first started practicing law as a partner in the firm where she had formerly been a secretary, there were only four women lawyers in the Greater Victoria area. She had graduated from the University of British Columbia at the top of her class. In 1964, with her husband, Foster Isherwood as a partner, the firm became Holmes and Isherwood.

Connie practices general civil law (real estate, mortgages, titles, wills, estates and family law) and she believes in networking and the power of “word of mouth” advertising. Today she has clients who are the grandchildren of former clients.

Home and family life are important to Connie, as is her continued connection with church and faith. Being of service and a willingness to lend a helping hand features prominently in her definition of success. That philosophy is manifested in her work as a mentor with Vancouver Island Women in Business, where membership largely consists of women entrepreneurs just starting in business. “Do research and plan first so you know where you are going,” she advises.

“A leader,” she says, “is one who has the quality to be a good administrator and is able to command the loyalty of his/her following and staff.”

Connie says George M. Cohan, often referred to as the father of American musical comedy, influenced her. “He had a philosophy of his own,” she says. “If he saw someone with a talent he didn’t have, he strove to shorten the gap between himself and that person. I thought that was a good philosophy to have because you can always learn from other people.”

While the law hasn’t changed much during her career, technological advances have been significant. “I think the greatest change for all of us has been the electronic age and the introduction of computers and automatic machines of many kinds that have changed reading, writing and arithmetic,” she says.

*“Have courage and keep your eyes on the prize.”*

## Rhonda Johnson

BATSTAR ADVENTURE TOURS | BATSTAR CAFÉ  
4785 BEAVER CREEK ROAD, PORT ALBERNI, BC  
250.724.2050 | [www.batstar.com](http://www.batstar.com)

Rhonda Johnson grew up enjoying the wonders of nature with her family and despite earning a law degree, she has never really been able to resist the call of the wild. Even as a lawyer, Rhonda spent hours organizing biking and hiking trips for her company's clients. A desire to get back to her roots and spend more time with her family led her and husband Blake to create an adventure tour business.

They took their time developing a solid business plan and after 11 years of practicing law, they launched Batstar Adventure Tours in 1999 in Port Alberni, providing well-organized trips to breathtaking wilderness locations. Their target market is in BC and Alberta.

"Attention to detail is the key to our success," says Johnson. "We spend a lot of time before people book, making sure the trip is right for them; it's important that our guests are compatible with one another so we keep a database with information on them. We just want our guests to relax and let nature rejuvenate them. Guests invest their most valuable commodity, their vacation time, with us so our mission is to give tremendous value for the time they spend."

Although she has always been completely involved with organizing the trips, for the first two years Rhonda remained in Edmonton with their two young children, continuing to work as a lawyer until they were sure the business would be viable.

"My home life used to be very separate from my business life and now everything is more interwoven. My children are part of the business; they greet guests and help clean the B & B. I'm with my family more and my children know what it's like to run a business and to work," she says. "The downside is there is no separation between work and home."

*"We make sure it's personalized. We spend a lot of time before people book, making sure the trip is right for them."*



Blake Johnson

“Stay with your vision but at the same time know you need to be flexible when opportunities and hardships present themselves”



“Make your product exciting, set the quality high and keep it there”

## Vivian Johnston

PACIFIC ECOVENTURES INC.  
517 VICTORIA RD., NANAIMO, BC  
250.754.0041 | [www.ecoventures.bc.ca](http://www.ecoventures.bc.ca)

Vivian Johnston loves her province and wanted to share it with others. In 1993, she started EcoVentures in Alert Bay, purchased an old church and turned it into a lodge/hostel. She approached Elderhostel, a non-profit agency that, in 90 countries of the world, offers educational adventures tailored to US and Canadian seniors' interests and activity levels. Vivian then created all-inclusive packages that were hosted from her lodge. “It gave me a chance to go to places I love and they paid me to go with them and share my interests and concerns.”

After three years she realized there was no real potential for growth, so she moved south to Nanaimo, opened Pacific EcoVentures and developed some new programs that were an instant success. Other than Elderhostel, Vivian says there is almost no one that provides a similar service. “Some museums and universities do educational tours, but that’s it,” she says.

“Our tours are highly educational and adventurous. For example, we have a 10-night program with a ‘regional studies’ theme about Vancouver Island.”

Participants learn about the development of BC, aboriginal cultures and local flora and fauna. Groups visit nature centers and museums, do field walks with

naturalists and travel by train, passenger/freighter vessels and sail boats. From Victoria and Nanaimo, Vivian also hosts walking programs for active seniors. Other program themes include wildlife viewing, artists of the Sunshine Coast, cross-country skiing, the Pacific Rim Whale Festival and fishing.

“The groups learn from highly qualified professionals; local individuals who know their subjects and can share their skills with the group in exciting ways,” says Vivian.

It took Vivian about eighteen months to successfully launch her business.

She started on a shoestring budget. “I couldn’t get a loan, couldn’t get a mortgage because I didn’t have a co-signer even though I was still working for the government and had a clean record. I eventually got a loan at a high interest rate which I had to keep for three years until I was able to get a mortgage.”

“You need to be self-sufficient, be flexible and never quit,” she says. “Make your product exciting, set the quality high and keep it there.”

*“It gave me a chance to go to places I love and they paid me to go with them and share my interests and concerns.”*

# Nat Johnstone

PACIFIC INTERIOR DÉCOR

837 FISGARD STREET, VICTORIA, BC  
250.483.4764 | [www.pacificinteriordecor.com](http://www.pacificinteriordecor.com)



When Natthakarn (Nat) Johnstone had difficulty returning to the workforce after taking time off to have a baby, she decided it was an opportunity to create her own job. A recent immigrant from Thailand, she says “language was a barrier and I didn’t feel I would fit in. Plus I’d been at home for a couple years. It was awkward getting out there at first.”

Nat found an opportunity to be a dealer for a window blind company. Working from home, she began by selling blinds and window treatments. Money was tight, so she built the business slowly, eventually expanding to include flooring. She incorporated in 2003 and opened a store in 2005.

At first she had to do everything herself. “I couldn’t outsource anything, so I had to learn bookkeeping,” she says. Now she employs 10 people.

“There are lots of people selling the same products and they are in the same price range,” says Nat. “The difference I make is in the service. I don’t work on commission so my focus is to maintain a solid client base. I personalize the purchasing process so that clients can find a product that fits their budget and their décor.”

In the beginning, Nat just set out to make a living. “Now I want to create something better than that. I want something more sustainable for my employees to provide them with a good future. I get people who have immigrated from everywhere who ask to work for me and if I can’t hire them I will help them find different places where they can find work.”

Nat is inspired by Victoria lawyer Connie Isherwood, who mentors entrepreneurs through the Vancouver Island Women’s Business Network. “She actually gives people courage. She’s an 80-year-old woman and is still very involved in the community. I think if she can enjoy being out there and active, so should I.”

Having her own business has given Nat higher self-esteem. “I feel like I am in a position now that I can give back to the community. I feel quite fortunate because I am in control of my own future now.”

*“I don’t sell my product—I sell on the type of service I give.”*

“Make sure the direction you are growing is what you want, not just because your client base is going in that direction”



“If you are going to handle staff you need to get some training in leadership and management”

## Michelle LaPointe

EM SALON AND SPA

4439 MARGARET STREET, PORT ALBERNI, BC

250.723.8322 | [www.emsalonspa.ca](http://www.emsalonspa.ca)

It used to be that if you said “green” and “hair” in the same breath it would be cause for great alarm. But, going green at Em Salon and Spa doesn’t involve a bad dye job; it’s all about being environmentally and socially conscious.

The majority of the products which owner Michelle Lapointe uses do not contain sulphates and she avoids using aerosol cans. She prefers to use products made with raw ingredients purchased from various countries’ indigenous villagers to help support them and she looks for packaging made from post consumer recycled product.

Her salon also supports fund-raising for different charities and participates in programs like Earth Month, to help support clean drinking water around the world.

When Michelle finished an aesthetics course in 1995 she worked for her mother. In 1997, they purchased a training school together and trained students in aesthetics and hair.

In November 1999 Michelle purchased Precisions Hair Studio from her mother. She received some of her funding through the Nuu-chah-nulth Economic Development Corporation (NEDC). She flew to New

York that same month to start training as an educator for a skin care line, then travelled all over BC, Alaska and the US training others.

In September 2001 she gave up travelling, and in 2005 she sold the school but kept the salon. In 2007, with the assistance of NEDC and her builder husband, she changed the location and name to Em Salon and Spa. (Em stands for Everyone Matters or M for Michelle.) “It has turned into a more service-oriented business instead of just a hair salon,” says Michelle. “There are more complimentary services now like scalp massages and hand massages.”

Both of Michelle’s parents were entrepreneurs and instilled a strong work ethic, she says. “I learned sales skills from my dad who sells vacuum cleaners.”

Michelle’s advice for anyone thinking of starting a business: “Educate yourself on the basics of running a business, and do a business plan. If you are going to handle staff you need to get some training in leadership and management.”

*“The opportunity was too great to resist.”*

# Kristina Long

AK GREEN INITIATIVES

2904 SHAKESPEARE STREET, VICTORIA, BC

250.592.2882 | [www.akgreen.ca](http://www.akgreen.ca)



Never one to waste an opportunity, Kristina Long decided to develop a business that would help people lessen the amount of garbage going into local landfills.

After conducting direct market research through 500 door-to-door surveys in her home town of Victoria, Kristina, who studied environmental science in university, says she knew exactly what types of products would sell, who to sell them to and what they should cost. With a start-up loan from Women's Enterprise Centre, the business plan for AK Green Initiatives went into action in May 2007.

Kristina decided to focus on plastic bag use. As landfills become clogged with bags that take thousands of years to be eliminated from the environment, her company's mission is to get people to use biodegradable bags and reduce this time and the impact on the environment dramatically. AK Green has quickly become the largest seller and distributor on Vancouver Island of biodegradable garbage bags, T-shirt shopping bags and custom plastics that disintegrate in one year.

"Marketing is the area that surprised me most in terms of the research and planning required. Even with the demand for our products we knew existed, we had to try a number of different advertising strategies to find out what worked best," she says.

The company has sourced three reliable manufacturers in the Lower Mainland; added an in-house design service so it can provide customized logos and company names on its products and streamlined its sales and marketing strategy. The result is a large and growing clientele ranging from residential customers to large corporations, school districts, municipalities, health authorities and even Victoria Airport.

With the rapid growth of the company during its first year, Kristina's ability to set and stay focused on her goals has proven to be one of her major strengths. She realizes she is a perfectionist and will do whatever it takes to ensure deadlines are met and she expects the same of her suppliers.

Stepping into the world of entrepreneurship has been a time of personal growth for Kristina as well as her company. "We represent a product that requires a personal relationship with the customer. We take pride in our availability, our focus on customer service and shared empathy towards the environment."

*"We represent a product that requires a personal relationship with the customer."*

“Marketing is the area that surprised me most in terms of the research and planning required”



“I had a lot of role models in this industry. I learned from their experience as to how to or how not to run a design company”

## Leah Rourke

ROURKE GROUP DESIGN INC  
SUITE A, 759 VANALMAN AVE, VICTORIA, BC  
250.383.3211 | [www.rourkedesign.com](http://www.rourkedesign.com)

Dream big. It's advice Leah Rourke gives her clients and staff and has decided to follow herself. Leah opened Rourke Group Design Inc. in February 2008. She and her staff provide interior design consulting from concept through construction, contract documents to completion and finishing. They also do space planning, and select finishes, paint colours and details.

Rourke Group Design differs from the majority of interior design companies in that all of the design staff has completed an accredited design program and they carry full liability insurance. Leah says that right now, anyone who picks colours or fabric for window treatments can call themselves an interior designer. But soon, legislation will require new designers to work under a registered interior designer.

Leah had to overcome a number of obstacles to get Rourke Group Design off the ground. After dissolving another company in which she had been a partner for three years, her finances were stretched. "My finances were tied up with dissolving the partnership and re-mortgaging my home," she says. She turned to Women's Enterprise Centre for a loan.

The timing for this business was really good, she says, because she already had a client base and had made a name for herself in the community. "The thing that has changed the most is I have more freedom and I know everything that is going on in my business. There's also more risk."

"When I look back, I didn't think that I'd be running a very successful busy company on my own," she says. "I have some high profile clients now that I wouldn't have imagined. As much as people like to dream big, you like to be realistic. I envisioned myself working out of my basement for the first five years. Instead I have a 2,200 square foot office and that's just within the first year."

Along with becoming a successful business owner by her mid-twenties, Leah managed to beat breast cancer. She was diagnosed in 2004 and clear in 2006.

*"Make sure the market will support you.  
Writing a business plan is the most challenging thing I ever did and it was well worth it."*

# Gerri Schelini

THE TUSCAN KITCHEN  
653 VIEW STREET, VICTORIA, BC  
250.386.8191 | [www.thetuskitchen.com](http://www.thetuskitchen.com)

Gerri Schelini has a love for all things Italian since her first trip to Italy in 1970, where she met her future husband and business partner.

In 1997, after raising two daughters and many more family trips to Italy, she opened the Tuscan Kitchen, a retail store specializing in Italian majolica, table linen, stemware, flatware and centerpieces as well as olive oils, pastas, sauces, herbs and spices.

Gerri wanted to be known for carrying only the best, so she learned from her clients and researched her products extensively. She and her staff are very knowledgeable about all of their products. After a few successful years at her original location, she partnered with her husband, Mauro and expanded to a larger shop downtown.

Gerri learned about customer service from her grandmother, who owned a lingerie store. “My grandmother, Julia Barclay, taught me the importance of presentation to the point where I think of her whenever I am gift wrapping something for a customer,” she says. “I received my appreciation of critical thinking from my father and my mother. They took over the lingerie store from my grandmother.”

When Gerri decided to go into business, she had no

money for start-up. She went to Women’s Enterprise Centre after being turned down by the banks. “They worked with me on the business plan,” she says, “and with \$50,000 we opened the first store.”

Gerri says it has been a wonderful business. “It’s been our livelihood for many years, for myself, my husband and my eldest daughter,” she says. “We’ve travelled to different markets and have met great people. We’ve made friendships with both our producers and our customers that we’ve met through the business.”

Despite the store’s success, they decided to remain a single outlet. “I didn’t want to risk losing what we have, but more importantly I didn’t want to exhaust ourselves to the point of having nothing in our lives but business,” she says. “Time spent with family, close friends, our beloved horses and photography must fit into our lives as well.”

Their website has allowed them to keep in touch with out-of-town customers and they are planning to add on-line shopping next.

*“To find balance in everything – to me that is success.”*



Mauro Schelini

“Respect your staff. You can have high expectations of them but you also have to accept their individuality and their capabilities”



## Theresa Siochowicz

THE WELDER CHIC WELDING AND FABRICATION  
5 798 FAIRVIEW ROAD, VICTORIA, BC  
250.893.2442 | [www.thewelderchic.com](http://www.thewelderchic.com)

Theresa Siochowicz never emphasizes the fact that she stands out – she is in a profession that is dominated by men and she owns the business. The Welder Chic also provides friendly customer service in an industry that isn't known for it.

Theresa owned a shop in Calgary for two years before moving to BC early in 2004 to start a new life for her son. As a single mom in subsidized housing, she needed financing and received a loan from Women's Enterprise Centre. Fortunately, she already knew how to run a business and it only took five months to get everything into place.

"When I started my business it was serendipitous," she says. "I landed on my feet. I didn't think about it too much; just did the leg work and did the business." Since she started The Welder Chic, many people have asked her about welding and about business. Theresa is now presenting welding workshops for women. "My best piece of advice is to stop thinking about it and just do it; stay away from analysis paralysis," she says.

As a journeyman welder, Theresa is qualified to work on any structure, meeting construction industry standards. But the primary focus of her business is gates, railings,

custom fabrication and artwork. "I'd rather do the custom artistic railings, gates and TIG stainless and aluminum work than building lawn mower parts," she says.

Theresa says women statistically control 82 per cent of family discretionary income and make buying decisions in the construction of their homes, even when it comes to products that require a welder. "I bring a friendliness and welcoming smile to an industry that is largely foreign to female consumers."

"My grandfather was my greatest role model," Theresa says. "He was very stoic and quiet and at the same time was a very clever man. He used to make ships in a bottle and repair watches as a hobby just for fun. He was always working, always doing something and was always there for us. He was our rock."

"Don't listen to the naysayers that think what if. If I thought too hard about what I was getting into I never would have done it," Theresa said. "Just do it. Sometimes people's best interests of caution could be a projection of their own fears."

*"Stop thinking about it and just do it:  
stay away from analysis paralysis."*

“My confidence level has skyrocketed since I started my own business. It feels great to have people come specifically to me to have work done”

# Pam Skelton

NOT JUST PRETTY MODERN ORGANIC CLOTHING  
1036 FORT STREET, VICTORIA, BC  
250.414.0414 | [www.notjustpretty.com](http://www.notjustpretty.com)

Pam Skelton sells eco-fashions that look good enough to eat. And from the list of the fabric content – milk proteins, corn, bamboo, soy – you probably could.

“In 2005 no one else in Victoria or BC was carrying fashion-forward clothing made with sustainable fabrics,” says Pam, who opened Not Just Pretty Modern Organic Clothing. “This is not just environmentally friendly hemp clothing. The clothes look great and the fact that they are eco-friendly and made with sustainable fabrics is a bonus.”

Once Pam came up with the idea, the bank gave her a line of credit and it took about two years to get the business off the ground.

Pam was an elementary school teacher and then ran an on-line store through eBay selling antique paintings. Although she had no formal training in fashion or retail, she thought having a retail store would be a lot of fun. “Unfortunately, I’m not in the store as much as I thought I would be,” says Pam. “I spend a lot more time in my office working on the background stuff.”

Pam says her mother was her biggest influence. “She was

an artist in New York and I would follow her around to her exhibits,” she says. “She went from art to owning her own retail store on Third Avenue.” Another inspiration is Megan Scott, the owner of Ivy’s Bookstore in Oak Bay. “She let me ask all the questions I wanted about being in retail both professionally and personally.”

Pam’s advice to would-be entrepreneurs: “Go talk to someone you respect who runs a business. Sit down with them and get a sense of what it is like. And make sure you plan well. The more planning you do the better it will be.”

“I had to learn how to live on a tight time schedule because the business takes up so much time, but I love it,” she says. She quickly taught herself to get plenty of help. “My husband and grown daughters are very supportive.”

Pam has started an on-line store and is planning on expanding to carry plus sizes this fall.

*“I had a vision of me doing all the ordering then standing in the store and selling to people. It is WAY more complicated than that.”*



Katrina Smith

“Go talk to someone you respect who runs a business. Sit down with them and get a sense of what it is like”



## Leah Tremain

TREMAIN MEDIA INC. (FORMERLY READ-TV)  
 P.O. BOX 553, CAMPBELL RIVER, BC  
 888.843.9428 | [www.readtv.com](http://www.readtv.com)

Leah Tremain took the long road to entrepreneurship but she is happy for making the trip. “For me, it was a gradual transition from being an employee, to a consultant, to a sole-proprietorship to owning an incorporated company. Now that I’ve been in it so long, I wish someone would have told me that a) it was possible and b) that it would be this much fun. I would have pushed myself here a long time ago.”

Leah learned to create media in a trainer/technologist job in the not-for-profit sector, she says. She left the job after six years and worked as a consultant, then returned to school to earn a master’s degree in education. Her thesis project was an educational DVD for children.

“As soon as I finished school I started working at selling that DVD to a variety of markets with support from the University of Victoria Industrial Liaison Office. From business idea to launch took about two years. It might have happened sooner but I had my first child in the middle of that process,” she says.

While Leah’s first products were geared towards entertaining and educating children, now many of the products are education tools for parents at various stages

of their children’s lives, focusing on speech, reading or numeracy. “As the children who were my original niche market grow, so does my product line,” says Leah.

“Everything we make, we own, which isn’t very common in the media industry, especially with video,” says Leah. “The company has always paid for itself and now I’m putting the profits back into the company.”

Leah’s advice for those starting out: “Do a little acting. Be more confident than you feel. Make that call you’re nervous to make. If you’re feeling really shaken have a script. Wear what you think someone powerful would wear.”

*“Now that I’ve been in it so long I wish someone would have told me that a) it was possible and b) that it would be this much fun; I would have pushed myself here a long time ago.”*

“No” isn’t a place to stop,  
 it’s where  
 you grow from”

# Ariana Turner

TURNER RESTORATIONS  
435 HILLSIDE AVENUE, VICTORIA, BC  
250.381.4472

When one of life's doors closed on Ariana Turner, the window she opened led to a kitchen and her own restoration business.

Ariana started Turner Restoration in 1999 after she lost her job of eight years without any notice. Although she could have found employment with another furniture company, she decided she "didn't want to be at anyone else's mercy again."

While she had thought about starting her own business three or four years earlier, Ariana says it took six months after she lost her job to actually launch her own business. "I was a single mom on Employment Insurance and had no savings," she says. "I approached six different banks and they all laughed at me. The only avenue available to me was Women's Enterprise Centre. I approached them to apply for a loan and they helped me out with the business plan and what was required. Once I had it together, I submitted it, they approved it and Turner Restorations was born."

Today, she is the only refinisher in Victoria who works on kitchens and one of a small handful of women who own their own restoration companies. "I will pretty much

refinish anything made out of wood and repair anything regardless of the age of the piece." Ariana gets calls from all over the Island now to come and refinish people's kitchens. "I've never had an unhappy customer," she says.

Her success in business has allowed her to buy her own home. "I have a comfortable life," she says. "Today I am more confident and less fearful than I was when I started my own business nine years ago. I know now that I can get the job done and overcome any problems that may occur during the process."

Her original vision for the business hasn't changed much. "One day I hope not to have to work so hard at it," she says. "Eventually I would like to have people around me to run the business and keep my involvement to part time."

*"I've gotten the business to a point where most of the clients come to me through referrals."*



Paul Jacobs

“I admire the women in my family. I admire my mom’s compassion and the will, strength and independence of my sister”



# Karen Waters

AKRIBELA SURFACING INC.  
6458 NEVILANE DRIVE, DUNCAN, BC  
250.746.9652 | [www.akribelasurfacing.com](http://www.akribelasurfacing.com)

*Akribela: [ak-ree-BELL-a] v. from the Greek: 1) to do things precisely and exactly correct.*

Mix one seasoned business consultant with exceptional administration skills with a creative and talented master fabricator and what do you get? The foundation for a high-end, custom countertop partnership that is serving the needs of both homeowners and kitchen retail giants.

When Karen Waters (the business wiz) and Joey Lang (the talented artist) established their partnership, they also formalized a commitment to excellence by naming their business Akribela Surfacing. The duo are living out the company name's definition and doing everything right to surpass their customers' expectations for quality products and outstanding service.

Karen, an MBA graduate from Queens University, was a professional cellist, teacher and business consultant before spending four successful years as a mentor to real estate investors. Joey's skills as a craftsman were honed over 20 years working as a solid surface fabricator. In 2007, with the construction industry strong, the couple purchased property in Maple Bay on central Vancouver Island. They renovated a house, passing their first major test at working together and built a shop for their

business on the property.

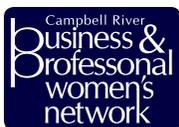
Strategic marketing put the company top of mind with local homeowners until word of mouth referrals took over and additional business came in through architects, kitchen designers and cabinet shops. IKEA also became a customer. With a loan from Women's Enterprise Centre, the company's ability to acquire more capacity sealed a deal with Canadian hardware giant RONA.

Karen says the key to the company's success is their commitment to a concept proposed by author Michael Gerber of the E-Myth series. He teaches business owners to work "on their business" not "in their business", by creating systems so operations run more smoothly on their own. Karen says she has purposely stayed hands-on with the business in order to understand every aspect of it, "but as we grow we will contract out so that we can focus on what we do best."

"It's our ability to successfully combine our strengths that is enabling us to achieve our goals within all aspects of the business," says Karen. "It's a great partnership!"

*"I think a big mistake entrepreneurs make is thinking they can do everything well all of the time."*

“As you grow, contract out what you can so that you can focus on what you do best”



### Campbell River Business & Professional Women's Network

PO Box 862, Campbell River, BC

[www.bpwn.org](http://www.bpwn.org)

Serving Campbell River and the surrounding area, the Network 'provides leadership and growth opportunities to women in the community who want to develop their skills and contacts in a supportive organization.' Meetings, held the last Tuesday of the month, host interesting and inspirational guest speakers. A networking director ensures that members develop their skills for use in any situation and the 'In the Spotlight' feature provides members with greater exposure and the opportunity to practice their public speaking skills. A 'Member of the Year' award and two student bursaries allow the Network to recognize local women.



### Comox Valley Women's Business Network

PO Box 3414, Courtenay, BC

[www.cvwbn.org](http://www.cvwbn.org)

Serving the Comox Valley area, the Comox Valley Women's Business Network, an energetic and diverse group of business and professional women, was created to be a catalyst for excellence. Monthly meetings, the 2nd Tuesday from September to June, feature networking, guest speakers, an 'In the Spotlight' segment and involve interactive discussions with experienced entrepreneurs. Networking is focused on specific goals; talk with everyone at the table, do business with members whenever possible, bring a guest and get involved. 'The Link', the Network's newsletter accepts articles from, and profiles, members.



### Ladysmith Women's Business Network

PO Box 2071, Ladysmith, BC

[www.lwbn.ca](http://www.lwbn.ca)

Ladysmith Women's Business Network, established in 1996, "is committed to providing a forum for the mutual encouragement and support of women in all walks of life." The Network offers a range of programs including mentoring, workshops and a business directory. Ladysmith Women is involved in the community through support of local charities, sponsoring students in the Youth Ambassador Program as well as providing a bursary for women at Vancouver Island University. Meeting on the third Wednesday of the month, members receive complimentary business profiles on the Network's website and a monthly e-newsletter.



### Nanaimo Women's Business Network

250.797.0954, PO Box 1044, Station A, Nanaimo, BC

[www.nwbn.ca](http://www.nwbn.ca)

Founded in 1989, Nanaimo Women's Business Network serves the mid-Vancouver Island area. "Dedicated to providing a forum for the mutual encouragement and support of business women," it offers marketing workshops and networking that provide both social and educational opportunities for women to promote their businesses. Nanaimo WBN invites women to join them in activities that empower, develop and enhance their business and personal lives as well as contribute to the community. Meeting the last Monday of the month from September to June, members enjoy reduced rates for events and a monthly newsletter.

[www.owbn.ca](http://www.owbn.ca)

**Oceanside Women's Business Network**  
250.248.1071, PO Box 51, Parksville, BC



Created in 1992, the Oceanside Women's Business Network is "dedicated to providing a networking opportunity for mutual support of women and their endeavours." Serving Parksville, Qualicum Beach and surrounding area, Oceanside WBN is committed to the personal and professional development of its members and invites women of all career stages to join their vibrant and diverse group. Monthly dinner meetings, held the third Thursday of the month, feature networking and educational guest speakers in a fun and social atmosphere. Members enjoy reduced rates for events as well as an on-line member directory.

[www.viwbm.org](http://www.viwbm.org)

**Vancouver Island Women's Business Network**  
222 - 110 - 174 Wilson Street, Victoria, BC



Vancouver Island Women's Business Network "provides a forum for business women, entrepreneurs and professional women to come together to share ideas, experiences and celebrate achievements." Established in 1989 to serve the Greater Victoria area, the organization assists women by promoting educational development and contributing to the community. Networking, mentoring and workshops as well as a monthly, informal, "Let's Do Lunch" and a more formal mixer, focus on building business relationships. An e-newsletter reaches over 400 subscribers and the annual "Celebrate! Women in Business" awards recognize outstanding local businesswomen.

Women's Business Networks help entrepreneurs access valuable education and mentoring resources and help women connect with each other, which increases their confidence and helps them grow their business.

*Laurel Douglas, CEO Women's Enterprise Centre*

# Other BC Women's Business Organizations

## For Profit

The Connected Women  
[www.womenconnected.com](http://www.womenconnected.com)



Enterprising Moms Network  
[www.enterprisingmomsnetwork.com](http://www.enterprisingmomsnetwork.com)



Ladies Who Launch  
[www.ladieswholaunch.com](http://www.ladieswholaunch.com)



Mom Café  
[www.momcafé.net](http://www.momcafé.net)



## Not for Profit

BC & Yukon BPW  
[www.bpwbcyukon.com](http://www.bpwbcyukon.com)



BC Farm Women's Network  
[www.bcfarm.100mile.com](http://www.bcfarm.100mile.com)



Wired Woman  
[www.wiredwoman.com](http://www.wiredwoman.com)



Women in Leadership Foundation  
[www.womeninleadership.ca](http://www.womeninleadership.ca)





# Contributors

Western Economic Diversification Canada,  
Honourable Rona Ambrose, Minister  
[www.wd.gc.ca](http://www.wd.gc.ca)



Western Economic Diversification Canada  
Diversification de l'économie de l'Ouest Canada



BDC - Business Development Bank of Canada  
[www.bdc.ca](http://www.bdc.ca)



Ministry of Small Business and Revenue,  
Honourable Kevin Krueger, Minister  
[www.sbr.gov.bc.ca](http://www.sbr.gov.bc.ca)



Black Press  
[www.blackpress.ca](http://www.blackpress.ca)

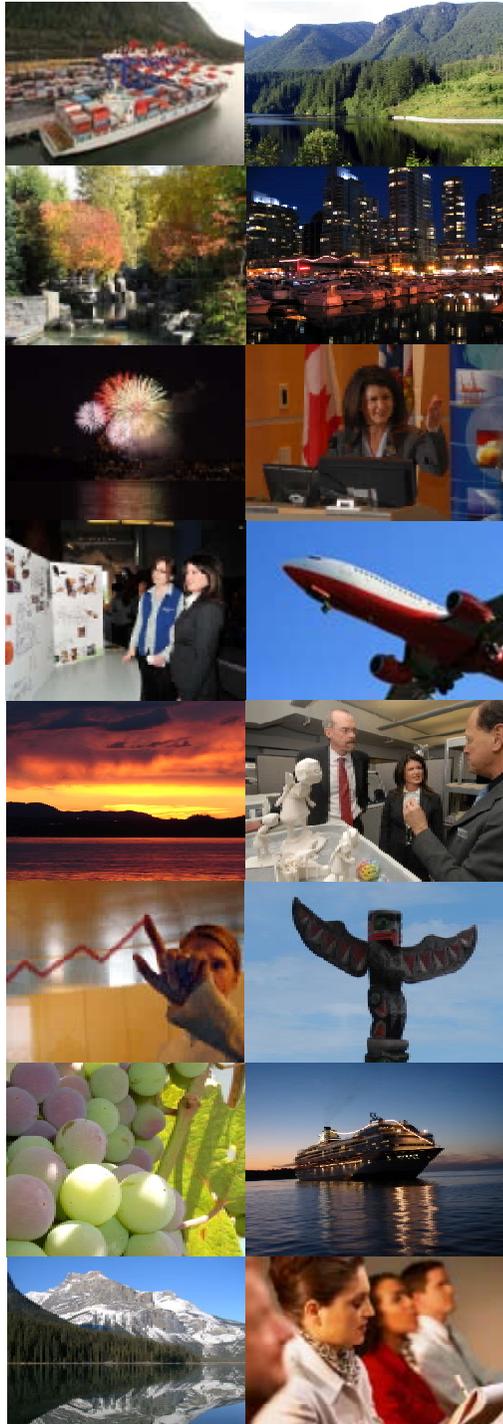


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Western Economic  
Diversification Canada

Diversification de l'économie  
de l'Ouest Canada

## A stronger West. A stronger Canada

Western Economic Diversification Canada works to strengthen western innovation, entrepreneurship and community economic development. We're building a stronger West in a stronger Canada.

### Western Canada Business Service Network

WD supports small- and medium-sized businesses through an integrated network of organizations. The Western Canada Business Service Network partners, including the Women's Enterprise Centre, Canada Business, Community Futures and Francophone Economic Development Organizations, provide more than 100 points of service where western Canadians can access invaluable business services and resources to help them succeed.

For more information visit [www.wd.gc.ca](http://www.wd.gc.ca).

### Renforcer l'Ouest pour édifier un Canada plus fort

Diversification de l'économie de l'Ouest Canada s'efforce de renforcer l'innovation, l'entrepreneuriat et le développement économique communautaire dans l'Ouest. Nous renforçons l'Ouest pour édifier un Canada plus fort.

### Réseau de services aux entreprises de l'Ouest canadien

DEO appuie des petites et moyennes entreprises grâce à un réseau intégré d'organisations. Les partenaires du Réseau de services aux entreprises de l'Ouest canadien, notamment les Centres d'entreprise des femmes, Entreprises Canada, Développement des collectivités et les Organisations francophones à vocation économique, offrent plus de 100 bureaux où les Canadiens de l'Ouest peuvent accéder à des services aux entreprises et des ressources inestimables pour assurer le succès de leurs entreprises.

Pour plus de renseignements, visitez [www.deo.gc.ca](http://www.deo.gc.ca).

## BECAUSE THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT NEVER SLEEPS...

- Congratulations to the “New Pioneers”. BDC appreciates just how much passion and hard work you put into your business. That’s why BDC offers financing and consulting solutions to help you grow and develop your company.
- Whether you are starting, expanding or selling your business, BDC is here to help you build your dreams and conquer new frontiers.

[www.bdc.ca](http://www.bdc.ca)

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Canada



Banking on Canadian entrepreneurs



# New Pioneers Index

Acheson, Kelly.....	30	Green, Maria.....	71	Murphy, Karen .....	54
Adams, Sue.....	62	Greenberg, Jennifer .....	22	Negriz, Cybele.....	98
Alexander, Diana.....	16	Griffith, Eryn.....	23	Nourinejad, Jinous .....	76
Arankunda, Maria.....	63	Hedbaut, Christine.....	91	O'Brien, Lillian.....	77
Axelsson, Tracey.....	88	Helin, Leanne.....	115	Pallesen, Denise .....	36
Barnard, Angie.....	110	Huppie, Maya .....	33	Palmer, Brenda .....	37
Barton, Betty.....	17	Ironmonger, Gina, .....	34	Parker, Nancy.....	78
Bell, Helen .....	64	Isherwood, Connie.....	116	Peters, Zu.....	55
Benson, Donna.....	42	Johnson, Rhonda .....	117	Pont, Lynn .....	56
Biggs, Victoria.....	65	Johnston, Barbra.....	48	Quaale, Angie .....	79
Bonner, Sarah .....	89	Johnston, Vivian .....	118	Reilly, Tami .....	80
Brown, Esther .....	43	Johnstone, Nat.....	119	Rella, Cathy .....	38
Callahan, Heather.....	31	Joyce, Lori.....	104	Rivera MacGregor, Elena.....	99
Cham, Lisa .....	44	Kallweit Graham, Karen.....	72	Rourke, Leah .....	122
Clark, Tamara.....	90	Ketler, Lorna.....	92	Schelini, Gerri .....	123
Creelman-Jenkins, Heather .....	66	Kopp, LeiLani.....	73	Siochowicz, Theresa.....	124
Datt, Shushma.....	67	Kreykenbohm, Grace.....	74	Skelton, Pam.....	125
Davidson, Ramona.....	18	LaPointe, Michelle.....	120	Stark, Vera .....	57
Davison, Chela.....	68	Legriz, Teena.....	93	Tatarin, Danielle.....	100
Dawson, Judith .....	45	LeMoel, Karen.....	35	Tomlinson, Lila .....	39
de Laa, Anyes.....	111	Leroux, Deb.....	49	Toube, Anne.....	81
Denison, Donna .....	46	Levac, Angelique.....	24	Tremain, Leah .....	126
Dhanji, Nasim .....	75	Linklater, Alison .....	50	Turner, Angela .....	82
Dixon-Warren, Heloise .....	191	Lohan, Selena .....	94	Turner, Ariana.....	127
Drew, Maureen .....	112	Long, Kristina.....	121	Varadarajulu, Chindi.....	101
Ebrahim, Shehla .....	69	Mawani, Shelina .....	75	Vasiljevic, Biljana .....	102
Farthing, Tattney-Lee .....	113	McArthur, Judy.....	112	Walker, Amy .....	103
Feirin, Janet.....	91	McCallum, Lesley.....	51	Waters, Karen.....	128
Finley, Jennifer .....	54	Mclvor, Kim.....	25	White, Heather .....	104
Florence, Elinor.....	32	McNicol, Tana.....	73	Wilson, Danielle.....	105
Gagnon, Susan .....	70	Melcosky, Ellen .....	52	Wilson, Tara .....	26
Gifford Brown, Janet.....	20	Mick, Suzanne .....	47	Wong, Lindsay .....	40
Gower, Tryna .....	21	Miles, Sandra.....	95	Woodward, Tana .....	27
Grace, Julia.....	114	Moore, Tammy.....	53	Xenis, Marlene.....	83
Grace, Susan.....	114	Moshurchak, Sara.....	96	Yang, Chanel .....	106
Gray, Tracy.....	47	Murphy, Amber.....	97	Zacharias, Melody.....	58

# Business Index

1 Fish 2 Fish Seafood Market Inc.....	66	Harris Flowers .....	49	Purple Dragon Academy of Don Jitsu Ryu.....	97
Adventure Engine Inc.....	30	Haven Hair Inc.....	68	Reel Steel Ltd.....	64
AfriCouture.....	77	Holmes and Isherwood.....	116	Rivera Design Group Ltd.....	99
Afterglow Skin & Laser Centre .....	69	Insignia Recognition & ID Products.....	74	Riverbend Equestrian Centre.....	33
Agri-Green BioDiesel Inc.....	39	Interior Academy of Hair Design & Esthetics .....	57	Rourke Group Design Inc.....	22
AK Green Initiatives.....	121	IT Productions Ltd.....	67	Ruins Board Shop.....	26
Akribela Surfacing Inc.....	128	Kallweit Graham Architecture Inc.....	72	Sante Skin & Laser Centre.....	16
Angelique's Native Arts.....	24	Keystone Appraisals Inc.....	34	Shuswap Homeopathy Clinic.....	45
APO Encryption .....	58	Kootenay Knitting Company Ltd.....	38	Soul Comfort Sheepskin & Leather.....	111
Artisan Edibles Fine Food Company Ltd.....	112	L'Amour du Vin/Canadian Corner.....	106	Stick With Us Products Inc.....	76
Artistic Lighting Design.....	51	Leanne Helin Tsimshian Native Jewelry .....	115	Sweet LeiLani Colour Cosmeceuticals .....	73
Barton Construction Inc.....	17	Leopards & Roses Trading Inc.....	81	SYKA Textiles Trading Corp.....	70
Batstar Adventure Tours/Batstar Café and Picnic.....	117	Little Creek Gardens .....	46	Tana Woodward & Associates – Virtual Office Services.....	27
Bevendale Enterprises Inc.....	62	Little Miss Chief Gourmet Products Inc.....	52	The Artful Cup / Urban Colour.....	23
Birch Place Farm.....	25	Madhouse Creative Inc.....	53	The Columbia Valley Pioneer .....	32
Bodacious...Clothing to Celebrate Your Curves.....	92	Miles Employment Group Ltd.....	95	The Co-operative Auto Network.....	88
Bourbon Street Boutique.....	35	Mimic Baby Sign Language.....	94	The Fixx Café and Pasta Bar .....	44
Chutney Villa South Indian Cuisine Inc.....	101	Momentum Magazine.....	103	The Sweet Peanut Clothing Company Inc.....	105
Coffee Talk Express/The Pencil Box/Ramona's Promotions .....	18	Moonstruck Organic Cheese Inc.....	114	The Spelt Bakery .....	91
Cupcakes by Heather and Lori.....	104	Moose Meadows Farms .....	19	The Tuscan Kitchen Inc.....	123
Denim Pine™ Products Corp.....	56	Mrs. Palmer's Pantry.....	37	The Welder Chic Welding and Fabrication.....	124
Designer Cocktail Company.....	100	Nana's Kitchen and Hot Sauces Ltd.....	75	The Xenis Collection Ltd.....	83
Discover Wines Ltd.....	47	Nature's Formulae Health Products Ltd.....	48	Tremain Media Inc. (formerly Read-TV) .....	126
Eat Like a Millionaire Omnimedia Inc.....	82	New Westminster Denture Clinic .....	71	Tryna Gower Photography.....	21
Em Salon and Spa .....	120	Nima'ma Maternity Inc.....	93	Turner Restorations .....	127
Exhibit Cre8ive .....	102	Northwest Coast Books.....	20	Uniquely Green Home Decor.....	65
Express Gift Baskets Ltd./ Cookie Express Ltd.....	54	Not Just Pretty Modern Organic Clothing.....	125	Vancouver School of Bodywork & Massage .....	89
EyeBrowz Design Inc.....	78	Nutters Bulk and Natural Foods.....	36	VCM Auto Group Inc.....	113
Fernie Athletic Therapy and Rehabilitation.....	31	Object Design Wearable Art Gallery .....	90	Go Get Organized .....	80
Go Get Organized .....	80	Pacific EcoVentures Inc.....	118	Webnames.ca Inc.....	98
Granville Eyeland Framemakers.....	96	Pacific Interior Décor.....	119	Well Seasoned.....	79
Gypsy at Red Mountain Restaurant.....	40	Painted Turtle Guesthouse.....	110	Westwold Carrot Company.....	50
Handworks Gallery .....	43	PCT Networks Inc.....	42	World Shine Ltd.....	63
		Phoenix First Aid Services Inc.....	22	Zu's Kitchen/Spoonstruck Café and Catering .....	55

# Client Index - Loans, Business Advisory & Training

## Loan Clients

Arankunda, Maria	63
Benson, Donna	42
Bonner, Sarah	89
Cham, Lisa	44
Creelman-Jenkins, Heather	66
Datt, Shushma	67
Davidson, Ramona	18
de Laat, Anyes	111
Dhanji, Nasim	75
Farthing, Tattney-Lee	113
Feirin, Janet	91
Finley, Jennifer	54
Gagnon, Susan	70
Grace, Julia & Susan	114
Gray, Tracy	47
Green, Maria	71
Greenberg, Jennifer	22
Johnston, Vivian	118
Kallweit Graham, Karen	72
Kopp, LeiLani	73
Lohan, Selena	94
Long, Kristina	121
Mawani, Shelina	75
McNicol, Tana	73
Melcosky, Ellen	52
Mick, Suzanne	41
Miles, Sandra	95
Moshurchak, Sara	96
Murphy, Karen	54
Nourinejad, Jinous	76

Rourke, Leah	122
Schelini, Gerri	123
Siochowicz, Theresa	124
Toube, Anne	81
Turner, Ariana	127
Varadarajulu, Chindi	101
Vasiljevic, Biljana	102
Waters, Karen	128
Xenis, Marlene	83
Yang, Chanel	106

## Business Advisory & Training

Arankunda, Maria	63
Benson, Donna	42
Biggs, Victoria	65
Bonner, Sarah	89
Brown, Esther	43
Cham, Lisa	44
Creelman-Jenkins, Heather	66
Davidson, Ramona	18
Davison, Chela	68
Dawson, Jude	45
de Laat, Anyes	111
Denison, Donna	46
Drew, Maureen	112
Ebrahim, Shehla	69
Farthing, Tattney-Lee	113
Gagnon, Susan	70
Ironmonger, Gina	34
Johnston, Vivian	118

Johnstone, Nat	119
Joyce, Lori	104
Kallweit Graham, Karen	72
Kopp, LeiLani	73
Legris, Teena	93
Lohan, Selena	94
Long, Kristina	121
McArthur, Judy	112
McCallum, Lesley	51
McNicol, Tana	73
Moshurchak, Sara	96
Murphy, Amber	97
Nourinejad, Jinous	76
Pont, Lynn	56
Rivera MacGregor, Elena	99
Rourke, Leah	122
Schelini, Gerri	123
Siochowicz, Theresa	124
Skelton, Pam	125
Tatarin, Danielle	100
Toube, Anne	81
Tremain, Leah	126
Walker, Amy	103
Waters, Karen	128
White, Heather	104
Wilson, Danielle	105
Zacharias, Melody	58

# Volunteer Index

## Storytellers

Acheson, Kelly.....	30
Adams, Sue.....	62
Alexander, Diana.....	16
Axelsson, Tracey.....	88
Barnard, Angie .....	110
Barton, Betty.....	17
Biggs, Victoria.....	65
Brown, Esther .....	43
Callahan, Heather.....	31
Clark, Tamara.....	90
Davidson, Ramona .....	18
Dawson, Jude .....	45
de Laat, Anyes .....	111
Dixon-Warren, Heloise .....	19
Finley, Jennifer .....	54
Florence, Elinor.....	32
Gifford Brown, Janet.....	20
Gower, Tryna .....	21
Grace, Julia & Susan.....	114
Gray, Tracy.....	47
Greenberg, Jennifer .....	22
Griffith, Eryn.....	23
Huppie, Maya .....	33
Ironmonger, Gina .....	34
Isherwood, Connie.....	116
Johnson, Rhonda .....	117
Johnston, Barbra.....	48
Joyce, Lori .....	104
Kopp, LeiLani.....	73
Kreykenbohm, Grace .....	74
LaPointe, Michelle.....	120

LeMoel, Karen.....	35
Leroux, Deb.....	49
Levac, Angelique.....	24
Linklater, Alison .....	50
Mick, Suzanne .....	47
McNicol, Tana.....	73
Murphy, Amber.....	97
Murphy, Karen .....	54
Negriz, Cybele .....	98
Nourinejad, Jinous .....	76
Pallesen, Denise .....	36
Palmer, Brenda .....	37
Parker, Nancy .....	78
Peters, Zu.....	55
Quaale, Angie .....	79
Reilly, Tami .....	80
Rivera MacGregor, Elena .....	99
Siochowicz, Theresa.....	124
Skelton, Pam.....	125
Stark, Vera.....	57
Tomlinson, Lila .....	39
Tremain, Leah .....	126
Tunner, Angela .....	82
White, Heather .....	104
Wilson, Danielle.....	105
Wilson, Tara .....	26
Wong, Lindsay .....	40
Woodward, Tana .....	27
Yang, Chanel .....	106
Zacharias, Melody .....	58

## Mentors

Adams, Sue.....	62
Alexander, Diana.....	16
Gray, Tracy.....	47
LaPointe, Michelle.....	120
McNicol, Tana.....	73
Mick, Suzanne .....	47
Reilly, Tami .....	80
Stark, Vera.....	57

## Board Members

Barton, Betty .....	17
Moore, Tammy.....	53
Pallesen, Denise .....	36

# About Women's Enterprise Centre

Women's Enterprise Centre is BC's leading resource for women who are starting, purchasing or growing a small business. Established in 1995, we receive core funding from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), and project support from the Province of BC.

With offices and business advisors in Kelowna, Vancouver and Victoria, we provide essential resources and services designed to build business capacity and fuel success. Our professional team understands and relates to the unique circumstances of women business owners, providing tools and confidence through a supportive, individual and practical approach.

Women's Enterprise Centre has contributed to the growth and success of BC women entrepreneurs and we have responded to more than 60,000 inquiries for business information since 1995. Women's Enterprise Centre provides 'real-world' skills development in a number of essential subject areas required to run a strong business, in a variety of formats essential to business success including marketing, finance and strategic planning. Since our inception, over 15,000 clients have received training in more than 1,200 training sessions and our four Learning Guides cover the core skills and activities needed to make business a success.

Our complimentary Resource Guides help women start or grow their business or transition to self-employment by learning from the experience and stories of other women entrepreneurs.

Our unique business lending program combines loans of up to \$100,000 for new and existing businesses with ongoing, complimentary business counselling and advice. Over \$25 million in direct and leveraged financing has created over \$500 million in economic activity in the province since 1995. While only 35 per cent of entrepreneurs still are in business after five years, 73 per cent of Women's Enterprise loan clients are still in business after five years, a true measure of success for us.

We also provide complimentary professional guidance to help women address their business challenges and develop their start-up and growth strategies. Our business advisors provide individual business owners with professional, complimentary business counselling support, resources and referrals to other business service providers. In addition we manage a comprehensive mentoring program, provide research and information on women's entrepreneurship and we host networking and peer learning opportunities.

This unique combination of skills development, empowerment lending and professional guidance program have positioned us as the premier resource for BC women who want to gain the essential tools they need to succeed in business. We have developed a strong reputation as a quality service provider for both start-up and established businesses. Through our various initiatives, we have also developed a comprehensive community-based referral and service delivery network.

The challenges that women in business face in rural communities are often greater than in urban communities. Business infrastructures and resources within these communities are less developed and attitudinal barriers towards women in business are more acute. With fewer networking opportunities, feelings of isolation are more common for women entrepreneurs in these communities. Women's Enterprise Centre is able to fill the gaps across the province, in partnership with Women's Business Networks and other business service organizations.

For more information about Women's Enterprise Centre, our programs, training and events, please visit us at [womensenterprise.ca](http://womensenterprise.ca)



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