

SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATION: **WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS**

Mentorship

It pays to give and receive sound advice

At the base of Blackcomb Mountain in Whistler's Upper Village, Tanya Ewasiuk Goertzen and her husband Rod Goertzen own and operate a cosy 1,200-square-foot grocery store between the famed Fairmont Whistler and the new Whistler Four Seasons. Modelled on European markets that meet all the epicurean needs of their neighbours, **Upper Village Market** offers fresh cheeses, meats, breads, even gourmet gift baskets and freshly brewed organic coffee.

"We've been here for 13 years," says Ms. Ewasiuk Goertzen, "and we've taken our cues from the people who shop here. We carry products from all over the world, so people who visit from other countries find the foods they're familiar with as well as locally made products they can try or send home as gifts."

In 1994, Ms. Ewasiuk was approached by Sue Adams, a Whistler entrepreneur, and invited to manage an espresso café Ms. Adams and her husband were opening in the Upper Village. But after six happy and challenging years, in 2000, Ms. Ewasiuk felt she'd reached a personal crossroads. "We'd made a lot of changes along the way, consolidating the espresso café into the grocery store, adopting systems and procedures that made sense for the traffic and location. Everything was running well. I felt it was time for me to move on to the next challenge."

When she shared her plans with Ms. Adams, however, she received a counteroffer: why not buy the business? Rod Goertzen, Ms. Ewasiuk's boyfriend at the time (the couple is now married with two sons), signed on as business partner, and Ms. Ewasiuk made the leap from employee to entrepreneur.

Along the way, Ms. Adams has been an informal but invaluable mentor. Co-owner of Bevendale Enterprises Inc., The Grocery Store & Delish Café and Catering (Whistler), and the Pemberton Valley Supermarket, she is a serial entrepreneur with a line of successful businesses that date back to the early 1970s.

According to Ms. Adams, mentorship has always been an important element of her life, beginning in boarding school in Australia at age 11. More recently, she founded and is co-chair of the Woman of Whistler (WOW) Business Network and is active in many other community organizations. The recipient of a 2007 Business in Vancouver Influential Women in Business Award, she is also a peer mentorship facilitator with the Women's Enterprise Centre (see sidebars).

"We didn't have a formal mentorship relationship," says Ms. Ewasiuk Goertzen. "It was a natural evolution. Sue is extremely gracious, giving and open about her experience in business. She has a way of acknowledging decisions and accomplishments that makes you feel really good."

Just as importantly, says Ms. Ewasiuk Goertzen, "Working with someone who has experience gives you the idea that all things are possible, and that there is really no limit to what you can accomplish. Seeing someone else achieve success graciously and with integrity provides guideposts – you learn, among other things, that success doesn't necessarily depend on a cut-throat attitude."

For Ms. Adams, mentoring has been a deeply rewarding experience. "Often people get caught up in their own busy life and career struggle. Mentorship makes you stop and think about how you impact others in your daily life. It's extremely fulfilling."

"I am 61 now, and I find any opportunity I have to be around younger women in business to be really exciting. It keeps me in the loop – it's revitalizing. I've been very lucky with everything I've done, and if I can help others achieve that, I'm delighted to do so." ■



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Tanya Ewasiuk Goertzen made the leap from employee to entrepreneur when she and her husband Rod Goertzen bought the Upper Village Market, a gourmet grocery store and espresso bar at Whistler. Ms. Ewasiuk Goertzen says she has benefited from the gracious counsel of veteran entrepreneur Sue Adams, who sold the couple the store 13 years ago. For those who may not have such an angel on their side, organizations such as the Women's Enterprise Centre can help. To learn more, visit womensenterprise.ca.

Q&A with Laurel Douglas, CEO of Women's Enterprise Centre

The benefits of having a mentor

Why is mentorship so important to new small business owners?

When you become an entrepreneur, you generally go from having a support system around you to having to do everything and make all the decisions. That can be very daunting.

New business owners often don't know what they don't know. A mentor helps identify what the knowledge gaps are and what can be done to fill those gaps, because they've been through it and can direct others to resources that may speed up the process of learning. It provides relief from isolation as well. And having a sounding board for ideas, and the increase in confidence that comes with that, is invaluable.

Why is mentorship a particularly beneficial learning model for women entrepreneurs?

It provides hard skills, but it also provides emotional and psychological support, and women tend to have that kind of holistic view. When they go through the transition to self-employment, they have a lot of things they have to deal with: knowledge gaps, potentially some confidence issues, and issues around work-life balance. Having a mentor helps keep it all in perspective.

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The rewards of mentoring

Laurel Douglas, CEO of Women's Enterprise Centre in B.C., says being a role model helps a mentor strengthen her networks and partnerships in the community. "It's been shown that if you're a mentor, or in a mentoring program, you're more likely to seek alliances with other businesses, which we know is an important trend in business today."

The WEC's recently launched Peer Mentoring Groups program is already benefiting those involved. "Even if entrepreneurs are going through a similar phase of their business, they each have things to offer one another."

Want to become a mentor? Getting involved is easy. "For women with experience in business, it can be as simple as inviting a new business owner out for coffee," says Ms. Douglas.

To learn more, visit womensenterprise.ca.