

Portobello West Market Expands to East

Carlie Smith was quite young when she started her first business; in fact she was just a little girl at the time. While other entrepreneurial children were setting up roadside lemonade stands, she took her childhood endeavor to the next level by focusing on location, location, location!

"When I was six years old, I would pick fruit from our back yard and arrange them nicely on plates to sell to my dad's acupuncture patients that would visit his home office. How can you resist buying fresh fruit from a little girl who you just can't avoid walking past?" says Smith with a big grin.

Always admiring her dad's ability to be flexible and to adapt quickly to different situations, Smith followed in his entrepreneurial footsteps. Many years after her successes selling fruit, she finished her Entrepreneurial Management Degree at Royal Roads University in Victoria then quickly packed her bags and headed for London, England to live abroad.

It was in London that Smith discovered the local markets and quickly became an avid shopper at Spitalfields and Portobello Road Market. Her love for these markets and the fact that Vancouver was missing one with the consistency and scale of those in London, led her to open Portobello West Market when she returned home to Vancouver.

"When Portobello West first started, there were other markets and shows that were similar, however, they were held every six months or so. Portobello West is held monthly which allows customers to plan to come or to tell their friends to come along with them," says Smith.

Portobello West Market, a fashion and art market, quickly became a popular venue for new designers and artists to launch their products. In fact, the market has grown and become so successful in helping to foster the Vancouver fashion and art scene that Smith is expanding her business eastward.

"We recently brought the business to Calgary with a three-day market that is held twice a year. Already this has proven to be a great success in bringing new opportunities to their local designer community as well as providing more opportunities for the Vancouver designers," acknowledges Smith. "Now we are preparing to expand to Toronto with Portobello East in July 2009."

Smith participated last year in Women's Enterprise Centre's One-to-One Mentoring program as a Mentee. She says that having the support of another entrepreneurial woman helped her in pushing forward with the expansion of her business.

"The mentorship program was fantastic for me. I joined it at a time when I was making some major changes to my business, such as the expansion, and adding an admission fee to the market. It was great to have a skilled businesswoman, my mentor, to bounce ideas off of and to offer me an outside perspective."

Eagerly looking forward to the challenges and excitement that the expansion of her business will bring, Smith reflects on what she has learned thus far: "Being self-employed is a challenge and unfortunately there are many people that will always tell you that you can't do it, but don't listen to them! To be self-employed is to persevere and to never let anyone or anything deter you."

Women's Enterprise Centre is the go-to place for BC women business owners for business loans, skills training, business advisory services, resources, publications and referrals. Call us at 1.800.643.7014 or email info@womensenterprise.ca from anywhere in BC.

