

Floral Business Flourishes for Vernon Entrepreneur

Looking for a new challenge in life, Deb Leroux decided to put her self-taught business education to the test and purchase Vernon's oldest floral shop, Harris Flowers.

"The challenge that comes with running a business is what attracted me to entrepreneurship in the first place," says Leroux. "I wanted to take a product, an idea and a location and move it to the next level of productivity, profit and community support. Harris Flowers was the perfect opportunity to do so."

With 70 plus years of history behind it, Harris Flowers was already well integrated into Vernon history when Leroux purchased the business just over two years ago. It was the businesses invaluable allegiance with the cities history that drew Leroux to Harris Flowers in particular.

Leroux dedicated her first year as owner of Harris Flowers to re-branding and marketing the business. This allowed her to attract new clientele while still retaining dedicated customers. "We did not change our focus for our market, but we adapted our tools to complete our image. By tailoring our advertising campaigns for each occasion we were ahead on attracting customers. As a result our clientele has shifted towards weddings and home décor."

There is no doubt how important customers are to a business. As a savvy business woman, Leroux pays great attention to meeting their needs. "There is no way to not be customer focused in this industry. We talk to them, look them in the eye, go to their homes to deliver their product. We speak with them at all the highs and lows in their lives, we give advice on their health, their relationships and their gift choices," acknowledges Leroux. Outperforming her competition in service and quality is how she keeps her customers coming back time and time again

Harris Flowers customers are not the only ones to acknowledge the changes Leroux has integrated since taking over Harris Flowers. She has been nominated as Vernon Woman of the Year 2008 as well as Marketer of the Year and Small Business of the Year in the 2008 Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce Business Awards.

Leroux knows full well that being in business for yourself means that you are always learning. The biggest lesson she has faced is one that many new entrepreneurs struggle with: "Trying to control every aspect of your business without assistance is a short lived practical exercise," admits Leroux. "The ability to step outside your ego and find others who are better suited to participate in the success of the business is essential."

To find support during her business development, Leroux turned to the Women's Enterprise Centre Mentoring Program. Having participated in Peer Mentoring and One-to-One Mentoring, Leroux learned essential business skills while having support from women who have been through the struggles and successes of business.

"The mentoring programs have inspired and nurtured my own abilities and talents as an entrepreneur," recognizes Leroux. "The Peer Mentoring Group sessions were focused, reassuring and positive. We were inspired to be better business women, better leaders and possibly to become future business mentors ourselves."

Having spent the last six months in the Women's Enterprise Centre's One-to-One Mentoring program, Leroux was able to receive the personal support and encouragement of a Mentor.

“Through my Mentor, Theresa McPhillamey of 24 Karat Salon and Spa in Summerland, I have been privileged to share in the knowledge of this very successful woman. Through Theresa’s generosity and the honesty which we each bring to our mentoring experience, my business focus and personal well being have been supported. I feel very fortunate to have received the gift of Theresa as my business mentor,” says Leroux.

Based on all that she has learned since purchasing Harris Flowers, Leroux has one piece of advice for other women who are taking on entrepreneurship: “Take care of yourself. Treat yourself well, rest, exercise and surround yourself with supportive people who will also tell you the truth about your efforts.

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.