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PAGE ONE

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Monica Adair, principal architect at Acre Architects. She's one of 16 entrepreneurs across Atlantic Canada named to the Entrepreneurial Leaders Program. Photo: Cindy Wilson/Telegraph-Journal

LEADERSHIP ATLANTIC ENTREPRENEURS JOIN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

RHIANNON RUSSELL TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL
04 JUN 2013 08:17AM

SAINT JOHN – Sarah Albert says she was a kid who was never supposed to make it. Her mother was a heroin addict, and Albert passed through group homes and foster care as a ward of the court, in and out of trouble as a teenager. At 21, she became a single mom, living on social assistance. But she went back to school and got a job at the Royal Bank of Canada.

“I was just one of those kids, and I think that's the neat thing about entrepreneurs, we're all about survival,” said Albert, now president of Moncton-based PGYIN Holding Inc. and a mortgage broker.

“At around 15 years old, I made a choice. I stood in front of a judge one day and I said, ‘No, you have to put me in jail. I need you to help me. I don’t want to be like this. I want to be successful. I want to make it.’ And the rest is history. I’ve been fighting ever since.”

Albert, along with 15 other entrepreneurs, has been selected for the Wallace McCain Institute’s Entrepreneurial Leaders Program, a year-long mentorship of workshops and seminars to help them build better business judgment.

Nancy Mathis, the institute’s executive director, said acceptance to the program is competitive – 415 people applied this year – but once you’re in, it’s a nurturing environment.

The monthly conferences feature guest speakers, often authors or well-known entrepreneurs, and also allot time for the 16 members to share their own knowledge with each other.

“I think it’s going to be an incredible resource in terms of mentors and people that have a great deal of experience in terms of not only how to run a business but successfully run a business,” said Monica Adair, principal architect at Acre Architects in Saint John.

“You just realize that Atlantic Canada is just full of talent. So I feel really humbled by the whole experience to be able to be a part of that group.”

Some of those selected say they’ve felt they needed mentorship at one time or another.

“I knew that there was a need for a product just because people had asked for it and we were able to sell it again and again,” said Ryan Roberts, president and CEO of Managed Markets Rx Solutions Inc. in Saint John. “So I guess the market dictated that we were on the right track. But in terms of mentorship, many times I wonder if I’m making the right decision or are there better ways to do things.”

MMRX is a three-year-old software company that helps pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms control their brand messaging by ordering material such as sales kits, patient education documents or announcements about drug approvals by various insurance companies that meets regulatory requirements.

When Albert was nominated for the program, she hadn’t heard of it before, but she thought it would provide some much-needed support.

“I recognized that I was feeling a bit alone as an entrepreneur and not sure where to turn,” she said. “It’s a lot easier to do it with a group than it is to do it by yourself.”

Albert bought a PropertyGuys.com franchise in Moncton in 2011 and is now spearheading the company’s national mortgage vertical. Starting Monday, all of its online applications and referrals are processed out of the city’s office.

“Our role as the national mortgage brokerage will be to do mortgages and financing for clients across Canada that buy and send privately

and are looking for financial advice and whatnot,” Albert said.

Starting your own business can put you in a vulnerable position, Adair said. She launched Acre with her husband three years ago.

“When we first started – we’re the youngest architecture firm in New Brunswick – we really wanted to take that leap, but we realized when we take that leap, all of a sudden, you’re in charge,” she said.

“You have to get into that place where you’re able to give, to be able to really genuinely say, ‘Let’s make this work.’ And I think the environment’s set to do that properly.”

ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERS PROGRAM’S SIXTH COHORT

1. Monica Adair, Acre Architects Inc., Saint John

Named one of the top emerging design firms in Canada by Twenty + Change, Acre Architects is committed to expanding the role of contemporary architecture in New Brunswick.

2. Sarah Albert, PGYIN Holding Inc., Moncton

A multiple national award-winner in the PropertyGuys.com system, Albert is regarded as one of the top franchise operators in the country within a network of more than 100 locations coast-to-coast.

3. Laura Araneda, Vic Progressive Diamond Drilling Inc., Sussex

Araneda expanded the company from specializing in underground exploration to surface exploration and saw opportunities in providing mine services to established mines.

4. Keith Brideau, Historica Group of Companies, Saint John

Historica is known to offer some of the highest end residential and commercial real estate in the province.

5. Pam Cooley, CarShare Atlantic Ltd., Halifax

Cooley’s vision is to provide carsharing services to all the Atlantic provinces for people within cities and towns as well as inter-provincially.

6. Mike Cormier, Crandall Engineering Ltd., Moncton

Crandall Engineering is a 60-person consulting engineering firm specialized in civil, municipal, mechanical and electrical engineering.

7. Michel Gauvin, Kurius Intelligent Homes & Buildings, Dieppe

Kurius offers a wide range of products and services in security, advance access control, audio, video, life safety, communication solutions and providing 24-hour monitoring to both commercial and residential customers.

8. Guy Haché, West End Sports, Beresford

West End Sports specializes in the powersports industry, unit sales, service, parts and accessories.

9. Brandon Kolybaba, Sheepdog, Cloud A, Halifax

Sheepdog is a company dedicated to helping people harness the power of technology to realize significant organizational change.

10. Levi Lawrence, Real Food Connections Ltd., Fredericton

Real Food Connections is a local food grocery business representing over 130 small- and medium-scale food producers in southern New Brunswick.

11. Brent MacDonald, Xiplinx Technologies Ltd., Saint John

Xiplinx develops, sells, and supports software products in the manufacturing sector.

12. Jason Macdonald, MJL Enterprises Inc., Charlottetown

MJL builds customer-driven, specialized software for a range of industries including automotive, mortgage and sports.

13. Andy Osburn, Equals6.com, Halifax

Equals6 is a professional social network for students that provides them with funding, career opportunities and mentoring.

14. Sébastien Pitre, V. Pitre Fondation, Robertville

V. Pitre specializes in commercial and industrial concrete formwork covering many industries including forestry, mining, manufacturing and energy construction projects.

15. Ryan Roberts, Managed Markets Rx Solutions Inc., Saint John

MMRx specializes in helping marketers execute their brand strategies while maintaining compliance with its suite of hosted software products and services.

16. Kirsten Simonsen, Eastern Prosthetic Clinic, Moncton

The clinic provides comprehensive patient-centred prosthetic treatment to people who have experienced amputation or were born with limb absence.

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