

Raising eyebrows

PLUCKY WINNIPEG ENTREPRENEUR TURNS ARTISTRY INTO BOOMING BUSINESS

By: Murray McNeill

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DAVID LIPNOWSKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Founder and CEO of Brows by G, Giovanna Minenna at her shop on Grant Avenue.

A Winnipeg eyebrow artist hasn't been getting much sleep in the last couple of years, and that likely won't change for some time.

In the little more than two years since Giovanna Minenna moved back to Winnipeg from Toronto, the hard-driving 27-year-old has launched a home-based eyebrow-styling business — Brows by G — grew that into her first storefront salon and successfully launched a national training program for microblading technicians.

Microblading involves using a delicate needle and individual strokes to deposit pigment under the skin of the eyebrows to create the effect of natural, full brows.

She's on the verge of opening a second salon in the city, is exploring other growth options for her highly successful training program, and in a little more than two months she'll be off to Germany to represent Manitoba at a three-day international summit for young entrepreneurs.

About 500 entrepreneurs from around the world, including 35 from Canada, are slated to attend the G20 Young Entrepreneurs Alliance Summit from July 14 to 17 in Berlin. Minenna will be Manitoba's lone representative.

"Not a lot of sleep," is how she summed up the last couple of years during an interview Thursday. "But it's great. You work hard now and when you're a little older, you'll be able to kind of sit back and review what you've done and really enjoy it."

Minenna said she's pumped about attending the summit.

"It's going to be great because I'm going to make connections that I'll have for the rest of my life."

She also noted one of the summit's themes is how digitalization and technology can contribute to an entrepreneur's success.

"I think there is going to be a lot of people there who are going to introduce me to new technologies and new concepts that will really help me in my own business," she said.

Minenna said her program for microblading technicians has been a booming success since it launched about 18 months ago. It's offered in nine Canadian cities through partnerships with 12 beauty colleges in Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia. To date, she's helped to train more than 200 aspiring eyebrow artists, and there are opportunities to expand the program to beauty schools in other parts of the country.

"We're hoping to do the East Coast and to get into places like Ottawa, Montreal and Vancouver," she said.

"If things go well and we can expand into those areas, perhaps later on we can also go to the U.S. or overseas," she said.

"Maybe I'll make some contacts when I'm in Berlin. We'll see what happens."

That kind of passion and drive is one of the reasons Futurpreneur Canada, the organization that sends Canadian delegates to the G20 YEA Summit, invited Minenna to attend the event this year.

"We thought she would be a really great candidate because she is good at networking, she could franchise her idea in other countries, and she's going to meet a lot of interesting people," said Joelle Foster, Futurpreneur Canada's director for Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Futurpreneur Canada is a non-profit organization that provides non-collateral loans, mentorship and other startup services to budding entrepreneurs. It provided all of those things to Minenna when she was transitioning from a home-based business to her first storefront salon at 1682 Grant Ave.

"She's very good at what she does, so we were able to help her fulfil that dream of opening a storefront," Foster said.

The training program isn't the only thing Minenna is keen to grow. She'd like to expand her salon business to other parts of the country. First, she wants to see how things go with the second salon that's scheduled to open at 160 Provencher Blvd. next month.

"We want to see how these two (local salons) run, what the numbers look like, and whether we can afford to go elsewhere," she said. "We're a very young company, so we don't want to make too many rash moves or move too quickly and extend ourselves too thin."

Foster said that's another reason Futurpreneur thinks Minenna has a bright future.

"If you expand too fast... you can put yourself out of business. So she's doing it the smart way. She's opening a second location and making sure it's viable and making sure it has positive cash flow before she expands further."

Before returning to the city in January 2015, Minenna worked for more than three years as an eyebrow specialist and makeup artist in the fashion and film industries in Toronto.

One of the reasons she wanted to launch her business here was because at the time, there was no one specializing in microblading.

"Manitoba is also so up-and-coming" she said. "We're booming here and there are so many entrepreneurs working out of Manitoba who are talented artists, clothing designers, bakers, public relations firms and digital media agencies."

"I'll never regret this decision, ever," she said.

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