

# Blending best of both worlds

## MOTHERHOOD, ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEMAND SPECIAL KIND OF BALANCE

By Nancy Harper

**ANY YOUNG MOTHER** starting out in business and trying to juggle multiple roles — while also keeping the mommy guilt at bay — needs a handful of like-minded women who truly get where she's coming from.

It's the one thing that could very well keep her from losing her mind.

Janet Weldon, 29, is one young mom and entrepreneur who knew exactly what she needed when she was going out on her own: a good mentor or two. In fact, committing to a mentoring relationship for two years was one of the things Weldon needed in order to secure startup financing from the federal government.

The two women she sought out as mentors, Carly Kuntz and Dana Shortt, could not have been a better match.

"I wanted a mentor who was also a mom," Weldon explains. "I figured that would be my biggest challenge. They were both so receptive so quickly to sitting down and meeting with me."

The inspiration, mutual support and expertise that come from their shared situations just can't be bought, and the arrangement soon morphed into the not-for-profit Moms in Biz network, launched in late 2011.

With an MBA and a master's degree in sport and recreation administration under her belt, as well as several years' experience in project management, Weldon

is well qualified for her latest venture as owner of the Urban Wellness Studio in Kitchener's ultra-hip downtown Tannery District.

Urban Wellness is the fulfilment of Weldon's passion, but it's Moms in Biz that will help keep her on track as she juggles the business, a staff of seven health professionals, and a busy one-year-old.

For Weldon, inspiration for the moms' network — a monthly get-together in which 15 entrepreneurs who are also mothers meet for support and discussion — came from the book Mom Inc.

"Mom Inc. gave me that bit of confidence I needed," Weldon says. "I had this idea of 'Wouldn't it be cool to have a moms' network?' There are lots of women's groups in this area, but we realized there was a home for a group that was more about support for a membership that was very unique."

These moms don't have a corporation behind them. There's no marketing department, no legal support, no built-in consultancy. Each woman started her business from scratch, built up capital, hired staff, and did all those things that go with running one's own show.

In Waterloo Region, that's a pretty small demographic.

"The reason we gravitate toward this group is there's something very non-traditional about what we're all doing," ►



### MAKING IT WORK

(Left to right) Carly Kuntz, Janet Weldon and Dana Shortt found much common ground when they met through a mentorship program. Now they have connected with other women through Moms in Biz.

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► Weldon says. “There’s some sort of passion or flame that makes us a little different.

“Not only have we committed to taking on the family manager role, we’ve committed to taking on the CEO role in all of our businesses. We’re committed to not letting our roles as wives and mothers change, but we’re committed to this other side.”

Carly Kuntz, owner of The Waters spa in Waterloo, agrees.

“I had an entrepreneurial spirit from a very young age,” says the mother of twin eight-year-olds. “I knew I wanted to do my own thing, but what was that? From a long list of possible ideas, the spa was definitely the most capital-intensive so it was the most frightening. It was one of those things where the right thing happened at the right time, and I sort of got the sign that this was the one to pursue.”

Still, she wasn’t about to jump in without a strategy.

“I started business planning,” Kuntz says. “I spent a year doing it, hired consultants, went to trade shows, went to courses and started planning a business that I had only known from a client perspective.

“When you’ve got the business and the kids and a husband, you don’t have time for your girlfriends as often as you would like,” she adds. “(Moms in Biz) is kind of girlfriend time even though we’ve just met. We have the big things in common, the crucial things.”

Waterloo culinary guru Dana Shortt, who has a three-year-old son, also embodies the spirit of moms who really can have it all.

“Being in Toronto, there were so many great shops where you could pick up really nice quality, preservative-free homemade meals,” Shortt says.

“I love food, I love to cook, I love to entertain. I just thought we were missing something like that in town.

“I always thought I’d work for myself. Both my parents are entrepreneurs. On some level it was kind of scary to start, but I thought at 24, ‘This is what I’m going to do.’ ”

“Having a baby really changed things a lot for me in terms of career. Going back to my own job didn’t seem like the best fit.”

Janet Weldon, Urban Wellness Studio

Being her own boss at Dana Shortt Gourmet means great flexibility, but it also means that at times she will work a whole lot more than the average mom. It comes with the territory, and Moms in Biz comes as a welcome diversion.

“You can talk to people who really know how it feels, just kind of support each other,” Shortt says. “It’s just been great to get together with a group of women who are passionate and who understand each other and connect. Family’s great, but sometimes it’s great to have another opinion and perspective from a woman who’s trying to do it all and balance everything.”

“Most of us had pretty similar goals,” Weldon adds. “It’s about getting them done and being the best at them. We all found a time that worked for all of our family and work demands, day-care drop-offs. That I thought was really cool.

“As I look around the table, everyone is really young. Children are young, the women are young, the businesses are young. It’s a really cool dynamic. It positions us in the same time of life.”

There’s something about mothers networking in Kitchener and Waterloo that makes for a very timely trend, too. With factories being transformed into beautiful urban spaces, it’s a great time to be part of the business scene.

“This city is so close-knit,” Kuntz says. “Everything is who you know. It’s like two degrees of separation here. It makes it a supportive environment for small business. It’s a really good and vibrant area for entrepreneurship, and K-W is a great place to raise children.”

Weldon agrees: “It’s a town that is very supportive of entrepreneurship. Everybody you talk to and people you meet along the

## IS THIS A CHOICE FOR YOU?

So how do you know if being a mom in biz is for you?

For many women seeking to combine motherhood and career, self-employment is the answer. In fact, according to Mom Inc. (HarperCollins, 2011), more than 900,000 entrepreneurs in Canada are women — and many of them are also moms. This notion of having it all and doing it their own way makes mom entrepreneurship one of the fastest-growing segments of the Canadian economy.

But taking the plunge and making it work isn’t as simple as “putting down the diaper bag and picking up the briefcase,” as Mom Inc. puts it. So how does a mom with a head for business get started?

First, she’s got to ask herself plenty of questions. And she needs to have a burning desire to see her idea fulfilled.

“If it’s just sort of a fun idea, she’s not going to get to that next level,” Kuntz says. “She needs to really commit to see it through. And don’t take no for an answer! You have to be so committed to your idea that when someone says no, you just push through it. It’s never a no, it’s more ‘If we can’t do it that way, how can we do it?’ ”

“Know from Day 1 what makes you different,” Janet Weldon adds. “That’s going to be the one question you’re going to be asked every single day and you’ve got to have your elevator pitch ready to define that. There are some days when it’s like ‘I’m in way over my head.’ You need a network, a consultant, a mentor. You need somewhere to turn about the challenges that come up. If you have the entrepreneurial spirit, surround yourself with people who have the expertise.”

way often come back to see your business because they want to see you be successful. I think we’re at the beginning of an evolution for Kitchener.”

Being a mother and doing it all is a tough gig, but these women wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Balance is just so unattainable but harmony is good,” Weldon says. “For me (entrepreneurship) is something I’ve always been really passionate about. I’ve always had an entrepreneurial spirit that I’ve been trying to fit into corporate environments. It doesn’t always fit.

“This is a dream come true for me, quite literally. Having a baby really changed things a lot for me in terms of career. Going back to my own job didn’t seem like the best fit.

“I wanted to set a good example for (my son). I’m realizing now it’s so much different from a work-life balance perspective. Being your own boss is different when it comes to managing your life and structuring time with your kids. I wanted him to see that. I felt like if there was any time to take a risk, this was it.”

## A WHO’S WHO FOR MOMS IN BIZ

Founders Janet Weldon, Dana Shortt and Carly Kuntz decided to cap membership in the non-profit Moms in Biz because with too many participants, nothing would get done. What does the rest of the group look like? Meeting the first Tuesday of every month are:

- Nat Benninger - Nick and Nat’s Uptown 21
- Susan Broughton - All Things Tea
- Jennifer Freitas - Olivier Beauty Care
- Paula Garceau - Momstown Kitchener-Waterloo
- Katherine Gingrich, co-owner of Death Valley’s Little Brother
- Kirstie Herbstreit - The Culinary Studio
- Nimira Husein - Tadpole Children’s Shoppe (specialty children’s store)
- Rachel Kaufman Behling - Kaufman Arts Studio (artistic director/owner)
- Christine Kufke – Click Photography
- Jody O’Malley - The Culinary Studio
- Trish Unger - Belly Buttons and Wildberry Nutrition
- Lesley Warren - Lesley Warren Design Group Inc.

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