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FP ENTREPRENEUR

‘Young aboriginals have to see what’s possible’

MEDIA

Continued from Page FP1

“We see a lot of young people get into businesses that directly support the development of our natural resources, but I don’t think you can name a sector that our people are not engaged in. Within our own membership we have technology, media design, cosmetic companies, engineering firms, architects, lawyers and they are competing and succeeding. That is what Lisa is communicating,” he said.

“Certainly there are challenges, but if you are a young aboriginal person and all you read in the media is how your communities are failing, what seed will that plant in your psyche? On the other hand, if you start to see success stories of people just like you adding value to society, that’s where you start to develop pride. Positive energy breeds positive energy,” Mr. Gladu said.

Taking on this task is a challenge, but one Ms. Charleyboy is uniquely suited to. Growing up in suburban Abbotsford, B.C., the daughter of a non-native mother and a First Nations father who passed away when she was young, her interest in First Nations’ culture was only sparked after she moved to Toronto at the age of 17 to study fashion communications at Ryerson University.

She later transferred to York University to pursue a degree in journalism with the hope of entering the world of fashion magazines — a dream begun when she picked up her first copy of *Vogue* magazine at the age of 10.

“During my time at York University, I was introduced to the native arts community and that’s when I discovered my love and passion for indigenous and native culture. I had to go to the biggest city in Canada to find my culture.”

In 2007, Ms. Charleyboy started her blog, Urban Native Girl Stuff (the genesis of her current magazine) to explore topics of interest, which included native culture as well as politics, fashion, beauty and lifestyle, but also to test the market.

“I wanted to see if there was an audience for this type of writing.” As it turns out, there was an appetite both from native and non-native communities. “A lot of people told me they found their culture through the blog and were really proud to be a native person,” she said.

That connection translated into 10,000 Twitter followers and 5,000 unique visits a month to the blog. This past August, Ms. Charleyboy launched *Urban Native Magazine* to build on the interest she knew was there and turn it into a viable business, with revenue coming from advertising and sponsorship.

One revenue source she won’t be using is a pay wall. “I want the magazine to be accessible. I don’t want to hide behind pay walls,” she says. “As a teenager and young woman, I did not see positive reflections in mainstream media of indigenous and native people in a current and modern context. There were no online or offline publications that were offering that.”

To get the magazine up and running, Ms. Charleyboy took on a limited business partner who provided early financing. She continues to seek investment and says corporate sponsorships will be key moving forward. Because she had not monetized the blog, Ms. Charleyboy supported it by doing freelance and public relations/communications writing and she will continue to do that during the start-up phase of the magazine.

“I’m a lean startup. I chose not to try and access bank financing because I have student loans and don’t feel comfortable at this juncture to take on more debt,” she says.

A small business workshop put on by an employment and training centre for aboriginal people in Toronto helped her with her business plan and she received a small grant. She worked with a business mentor from CESO, an organization that matches senior level executives with aboriginal entrepreneurs to help her create a business plan to pitch to investors. Another option she is exploring is

Ryerson University’s Digital Media Zone to help accelerate the business by accessing mentorship.

At the annual CCAB-sponsored Aboriginal Entrepreneurs Conference and Trade Show, being held Nov. 4, 5 and 6 at the Hilton Lac-Leamy in Gatineau, Que., Ms. Charleyboy will take part in a panel discussion on how to build a business using digital communications and how to establish an authentic digital voice.

Her best lesson, she said is to “know your consumer demographic

and how and where they interact online. The goal is to create a community around your brand — not push out messages.

“The Native community is diverse. We have actors, musicians, business owners, doctors, lawyers. I want to show young people that there are many indigenous people who have walked those paths. I want young aboriginal people who may not have the role models other Canadians have to see what’s possible.”

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JP Gladu, CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.



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