

Meet the next  
generation of successful  
Canadian businesspeople.  
With a little help  
from a national charity,

# Making it Big

these young  
entrepreneurs are taking  
chances, dreaming big  
and reaching for the stars.  
Remember these names,  
because these are  
ones to watch.

BY EMILY WEXLER

On April 5th, in a hangar at the Toronto City Centre Airport, Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship, Harinder Takhar, stood in front of a helicopter and announced that the Ontario Government would be giving \$2.2 million towards helping young entrepreneurs. The money would be going to the Canadian Youth Business Foundation (CYBF), a national charity that supports young entrepreneurs age 18 to 34 by providing mentoring and start-up loans of up to \$15,000. Joined by the Honourable Brian Tobin, who is an advisor to the CYBF, Takhar explained how the charity has helped over 2,000 companies create 11,000 jobs and contribute \$211 million to the economy. The hangar was an appropriate venue for the press conference because it is the site of one of CYBF's success stories, The Helicopter Company – a company that demonstrates how the CYBF helps get businesses “off the ground.” They are just one example of a little company that could. Allow us to introduce to you a few of Ontario's up-and-coming success stories.

## THE HELICOPTER COMPANY

“Want to watch? It's pretty cool,” says Julia Henderson as we look out the window at the helicopter taking off below. She grins with pride as the helicopter takes off in a dramatic swoop – after all, that's her company's helicopter, and that's her staff below. The Helicopter Company took off in 1997 when Henderson and her partner Kevin Smith found themselves in need of jobs when the company they were working for left Toronto. Knowing that they didn't want to give up their love of flying helicopters, they looked around and

realized there was untapped potential in Toronto. “We found that [tourism] was the second largest industry in Toronto,” says Henderson, “and we thought, New York's got helicopters, San Francisco's got helicopters, Niagara's got helicopters, why not Canada's largest city?”

They knew that they wanted to start Toronto's first helicopter tourism business, but they needed help. “When we first started our business,” says Henderson, “we fell into a category of being young, one of the two partners female, and an industry out of the box – aviation.” Banks wouldn't touch them. That's when they discovered the CYBF. Not only did the charity provide a start-up loan, their unique mentoring program meant that the Helicopter Company could be matched up with different mentors depending on their needs. There has also been added perks, like this press conference, giving them critical exposure. “I'm just a stakeholder, and they do something like this for me – it's just phenomenal,” Henderson says.



While other helicopter tour companies have come and gone over the years, The Helicopter Company has secured their spot as the only helicopter tour operator in the city, flying 6,000 passengers and partnering with tourism giants like Expedia. If you're looking for a thrill, you can book a 9-minute tour for \$90 or upgrade with one of their many packages. While Henderson says she would like to increase the

amount of passengers they put through, you won't be seeing them fighting forest fires or using their copters for other means. “We have a motto in our company – if you split your focus,

you lose your focus,” she says. Luckily, The Helicopter Company is focused on success. Visit them at [www.thehelicoptercompany.com](http://www.thehelicoptercompany.com).

## JOBLOFT.COM

Sitting across from Chris Nguyen at the CYBF press conference, it's hard not to notice how young he looks. But don't let the youthful appearance fool you. Nguyen and his partners Andy Lai, Lee Lui and Sundeep Mokha may only be a year out of university, but they are the business savvy entrepreneurs behind one of the fastest growing Internet job sites in the country. While the big sites like Monster and Workopolis focus on careers, JobLoft is geared towards a younger market, focusing on retail, hospitality and food service jobs. “I was at the mall one day and I saw a group of students handing out resumes one by one,” says Nguyen. “They had a huge stack in their hands, so I thought, there must be an easier way to do that – help students find jobs, something closer to home.” Nguyen recruited his three Ryerson University classmates and convinced them to forgo the financial security of entering the workforce and join him on his venture.



What sets JobLoft apart is that the site focuses on proximity – something important to young people. “Picture yourself as a student with no public transit,” says Nguyen, “or you only have public transit with no car access.” The site works by entering your postal code, then a Google map shows you the jobs closest to your home. You can even get text messages sent to your phone when a new job becomes available – a key feature when trying to get a job in industries known for high turnover.

JobLoft may have started small but they have already experienced great success. Since its inception, it has partnered with some very big names. On the site you can find jobs at Best Buy, Blockbuster, Wal-Mart and H&M to name a few. While the website is already nationwide, they want to grow even further within Canada and eventually expand out into the US and the rest of the world – big plans for people who were sitting in a classroom a year ago. “We weren't ‘A’ students, but we had passion,” says Nguyen, “so if you have a passion, you can do anything.” Visit them at [www.jobloft.com](http://www.jobloft.com).

## LOVING PAWS & HOUSE SITTING

Amy Shannon Leclair is passionate about pets. In fact, she is so passionate that what started out as a side project – caring

for pets of friends and neighbours when they were away – has turned into a prosperous company with 10 regular employees servicing the Ottawa-Gatineau area. But Leclair is no amateur pet sitter, she has worked in the animal health care industry for about 12 years and before starting Loving Paws, she worked at Alta Vista Animal Hospital, the largest animal hospital in Ottawa. There she would see countless emergency situations involving pets that were left with inexperienced sitters. “Obviously there isn't a standard in the industry,” she says. “We're not controlled by the government like people healthcare, so I saw that there was a need for the professionalism of it.” What Leclair decided to offer was an alternative to bringing your pet to a kennel or paying a neighbour who might not have experience caring for pets. “A lot of people see these pets as their own family members,” she says, “and would you leave your child with someone who has no idea how to babysit?” When she started the company, she had no idea that the demand for her services would be so high. To meet the demand, she knew she'd have to hire staff, and she also knew she would need funding. Leclair came across the CYBF program by fluke when she was searching the Internet for tips on how to create a business plan. She says the loan from the CYBF turned out to be her best financial option. “That monthly payment is so small – that helps you to start to build your business and not have to worry right off the bat about paying these big monthly loan bills.”



The services that Loving Paws offers run the gamut from a simple dog walk to maintaining a home office. If you want to see a list of services, you simply have to log on to their extremely comprehensive website. Leclair feels that their strong web presence is crucial to their business. Another crucial aspect is the fact that they are accredited by the All Canadian Pet Services Network and recommended by the Alta Vista Animal Hospital. Loving Paws is selling peace of mind as much as they are selling their services. But for Amy Shannon Leclair, it's all about the pets: “At the end of the day, they give so much in return. It's amazing.” Visit them at [www.lovingpaws.ca](http://www.lovingpaws.ca).

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## JEFFREY ROSS JEWELLERY

Jeffrey Ross always knew he wanted to go into business for himself. "I can remember asking my parents what one of my uncles did and they described him as an entrepreneur," he says. "From a young age the concept appealed to me." But after graduating from the University of Guelph with a bachelor of science, he looked around at his employment



opportunities and found them to be less than appealing. Ross had always been captivated by gemstones, but it wasn't until he started planning his proposal to his fiancée that he realized jewellery was his calling. He enrolled in the Jewellery Arts program at George Brown College, where he excelled and received the Dean's Medal. After creating a few custom pieces for private clients, he moved to Uxbridge and set up shop.

Jeffrey Ross Jewellery officially opened just over a year ago, providing custom design and creation services, as well as a gallery that contains original works contributed by contemporary Canadian jewellery artists. The company works with lapidary artists, creating pieces that are truly unique. "We can start from the beginning with the gemstone," says Ross. "In fact, we can even have a gemstone created for our clients, which is a tremendous opportunity for them, particularly when they're looking for something that is essentially an expression of their individuality."

Like our other entrepreneurs, Jeffrey Ross has big plans. "Ultimately, I see us growing into a global brand recognized for the work that we do with coloured gemstones in particular," he says. Although his beginnings in Uxbridge may seem humble, he is already building a strong base of devoted clientele. But he couldn't have done it alone. Ross can't say enough about the benefits of being associated with the CYBF. "They are willing to take a chance on entrepreneurs," he says, "and that's wonderful because so much of our economy is based on the success of small business. Knowing that you've got the support out there that can help enable you to achieve your goals and dreams is fantastic." Visit him at [www.jeffreyrossjewellery.com](http://www.jeffreyrossjewellery.com)

For more information on the Canadian Youth Business Foundation, visit [www.cybf.ca](http://www.cybf.ca).

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