

KINGSTON



Global Talent Local Business

Celebrating Kingston's Newcomer Entrepreneurs

2023



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Welcome

On behalf of the Kingston Economic Development Corporation and the Kingston Immigration Partnership, we are delighted to recognize the contributions made by newcomers to this great city.

It is our pleasure to come together and celebrate the entrepreneurial culture and innovation of newcomer entrepreneurs in Kingston.

As organizations, we recognize the challenges that newcomers must surmount when moving to a new country. Starting a business is a daunting experience, but is even more when in a new environment. However, this has not blocked the significant contributions of these visionary individuals to the economic development of the City of Kingston.

The benefits of building an inclusive community cannot be overstated. Not only does it foster a sense of belonging, but it also creates an environment that is conducive to innovation and growth. It is with this in mind that we celebrate the success of these entrepreneurs and acknowledge their efforts in creating new products and services, creating jobs for others, boosting demand for local consumer goods, and contributing to the overall prosperity of Kingston.

Donna Gillespie

Chief Executive Officer,
Kingston Economic Development Corporation

Yu Jier Kou

Program Coordinator & Communications,
Kingston Immigration Partnership at Kingston
Community Health Centres

Conditioned for success

Meet Dr. Aba Bowles-Mortley

Dr. Aba Bowles-Mortley's entrepreneurial journey started with those simple but dangerous words, "let's see how it goes."

In 1985, Aba's mother, Cheryl, gave up her executive job at Nestlé and put her chemistry knowledge to work creating a line of cosmetics in her home country of Trinidad and Tobago. The line would be named, Cher-Mère.

In 1998, Aba moved to Kingston to complete an undergraduate degree at Queen's University. She later completed both a master's degree and a PhD in materials and chemical engineering at Royal Military College.

After her studies were complete, and a brief teaching stint, Aba decided to bring the family business to Kingston and to Canada.

"I am proud of the products, which work well and have been successful for more than 35 years in Trinidad," she said. "I didn't want Cher-Mère to end with me and a few friends encouraged me to take it on and so here we are, seven years later."

Shortly after graduating, Aba opened the first Kingston spa location for Cher-Mère Canada and



began selling cosmetics. She added another Kingston location in 2018.

Aba is also the Assistant General Manager for her mother's company, supporting the five Cher-Mère spas back in Trinidad and regularly seeks new opportunities to expand Cher-Mère internationally.

"We plan to start selling our cosmetic products online and we are investigating opening spas in other Caribbean and African countries," she said.

"We are also looking at manufacturing the cosmetics here to meet demand and possibly opening new stores, kiosks, or spas elsewhere in Canada."

Underpinning Aba's success is her community-focused approach. She enjoys meeting people through her business and wants clients to feel like they have a relationship with Cher-Mère and its employees.

Leading her own business has afforded her several leadership opportunities within the community, such as the chair role on the Tourism Kingston Board of Directors and a co-chair spot on the Queen's University Council on Anti-Racism and Equity. She has also volunteered at Youth Diversion for the past 20 years.

"I think that it is important to be an active member in the community," Aba said. "I think that every individual can be responsible for making changes within their communities through activism whether it be by volunteering your time or serving on boards to help make decisions that have a greater impact on the community as a whole."

Aba values the opportunity to give back to the community through her spas. Cher-Mère has fundraised for the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Youth Diversion and for causes such as breast cancer awareness.

These volunteer and philanthropic activities, coupled with Aba's people-centric approach, helped her develop the network that supported her success in Kingston.

"I grew a base of people who knew who I was before I started," she said. "There has to be some backing behind your great idea to help you validate that this is the right business. And, as every immigrant does, you need to work hard at it!"

When she's not in the spa, on a business call with her mother, volunteering, or at a board meeting, Aba spends time with her four children and her husband, who is also an entrepreneur.

"I'd like to be here for many years and continue my family business, if my kids choose to do so," she said. "I continue to seek new opportunities to learn, meet new people and support important causes in Kingston and beyond."



Fast Facts

Born in: Trinidad & Tobago

Business name: Cher-Mère

Industry: Spa services and cosmetics

Founded: 1985 in Trinidad, 2013 in Kingston

Employees: 11 in Kingston

Website: cher-mere.ca

A mission to teach millions

Meet Rizma Butt

Rizma was born in Lahore, Pakistan. She holds a BSc (Hons) with Double Major in Economics and Finance, from the Lahore School of Economics, Pakistan.

Rizma came to Canada in 2016 as an international student at Queen's University where she graduated with a Master's Degree in Management Innovation and Entrepreneurship from the Smith School of Business, Queen's University where she also acquired a Certificate in Social Impact from the Centre for Social Impact.

Her passion for human capacity development has been the driving force behind her participation in various community development activities, which led her to co-found 1 Million Teachers (1MT) with Hakeem Subair.

Her current focus is on 1MT/1MT Cares as COO and on a successful Pakistani fashion brand 'Iznic' with prior experience from Shopistan (an e-commerce solutions corporation) as the Chief Online Brand Manager. She also teaches at St. Lawrence College & Queen's University as a part-time Professor.

Additionally, Rizma has also worked with a small non-governmental organization (NGO), pushing change, and improving population outcomes that provided free education to underprivileged kids in Pakistan.

1MT currently facilitates the professional development of teachers in Nigeria, and 19 other African countries, and Pakistan. In 2018, they formalized a partnership with Canada's Queen's University's Faculty of Education to leverage the university's teacher education expertise and to help develop 1MT's program framework and content.

The partnership with 1MT is one of the university's international commitments to social justice and helps create a community of professional practice that improves teaching and learning globally. In 2019, 1MT signed a partnership with the Rwandan Education Board to train 10,000 teachers.

In 2021, 1MT became an implementing partner in the Global Partnership for Education\UNICEF\Federal Ministry of Education Continuing Education Through Alternate Home and Community-based Platform's initiative, where it trained 4,058 teachers and School Based Management Committee Members as well as 185,000 students through 561 community-based learning hubs in Sokoto, Zamfara, and Kebbi State.

Rizma believes the work they are doing is just a tip of the iceberg. Focusing on the most under-resourced communities across the world, 1MT empowers teachers to enhance learning outcomes for students through various reward-based teacher professional development programs. 1MT's objective is to increase access to quality training and professional development for teachers by:

- // Attracting new teachers to the teaching profession.
- // Providing training to untrained teachers who are active in the classroom, but unable to access formal training due to financial or geographic barriers or other constraints.
- // Providing ongoing professional development to teachers who are active in the classroom, thus encouraging continuous and lifelong learning and development.

"We are just getting started!" says, Rizma.



Fast Facts

Born in: Lahore, Pakistan

Business name: 1 Million Teachers

Industry: Not-for-profit

Founded: 2018

Employees: 13

Website: 1millionteachers.com

A unique flavour

Meet Gökhan Cifci

Gökhan Cifci's journey to Kingston is one of those classic 'boy meets girl' stories.

Gökhan started his career in the restaurant industry in his home country of Turkey, but wanted to apply his trade in another setting. He decided to try a life at sea and worked on cruise ships for several years. That is where he met his wife, Sarah.

As the relationship matured, the couple returned to Turkey so Gökhan could finish his degree in Restaurant, Travel & Tourism. Two years later, they came to Canada to be close to Sarah's family and to start their own business.

During his first few months after arrival, Gökhan helped his in-laws with their sheep farm in Athens, Ontario. His passion for the restaurant business had not gone away but he was having trouble finding work as he was overqualified for most positions.

After months of searching, he eventually found work and within a few years, he was a bartender at a downtown restaurant called Tango. That ended on one fateful day in 2013.

"Tango shut its doors in January 2013," he said. "Sarah and I discussed options and started making business plans. We took over the space in May and spent two months renovating."

The newly renamed Tango Nuevo re-opened with 13 employees in July of 2013. Gökhan's time in the local restaurant scene helped him put together a strong team, which included his wife as the Marketing Manager and his sister, Hediye, who migrated from Turkey to join him. Nearly ten years later, nine of the original 13 employees are still with him. He now employs 55 people.

Named one of Open Table's top romantic restaurants in Canada in 2017, Tango Nuevo, continues to receive glowing reviews. The busy eatery boasts many repeat customers as well as drawing new guests from as far away as Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. However for Gökhan, owning Tango Nuevo is more than just producing a good meal.

"The ideas of a fusion tapas restaurant is still a different concept in Kingston, so we train our staff to explain what we are and try to educate our guests," he said. "It's also important to me that we are consistently updating our look. We want to keep the fresh feeling alive for our guests, to have everyone feel like Tango Nuevo is new every time they come in. I feel there are still gaps in the local culinary scene and if we fill those gaps that will help attract more tourists."

When Gökhan first presented his idea for a tapas bar to the Downtown Kingston Business Improvement Area, they were very supportive of bringing this style of restaurant to a relatively small city like Kingston. He enjoyed strong support from his fellow restaurateurs, something which Gökhan is proud to reciprocate.

"If you look at the mural on my wall, I am advertising every single independent small restaurant downtown," he says. "I don't look at other restaurants as competition because we all share the same pie and if we're all stronger we'll attract more people."

Gökhan says in the years to come he and his team will be seeking to grow the company and tap into more

opportunities in Kingston's restaurant tourism sector. We are already seeing expansion, with the opening of Tango Nuevo's sister restaurant, Mayla Concept, in 2021. Located just two doors down from Tango Nuevo, guests experience sophisticated, fusion cuisine, with a relaxed, upscale feel in their intimate dining room.



Fast Facts

Born in: Turkey

Business name: Tango Nuevo & Mayla Concept

Industry: Food service

Founded: 2013

Employees: 55

Website: tangonuevo.ca

Designing beautiful communities

Meet Brian Dodo

Brian Dodo is more than just an award-winning designer with an impressive portfolio of clients who range from the corporate, public and non-profit sectors. He is also a family man, community builder, and entrepreneur who enjoys his work. Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Brian's passion for design started at a young age, and he has since built a successful career as the founder and principal of BmDodo Strategic Design.

Since going full-time with BmDodo Strategic Design in 2005, Brian and Partner, Jen Cameron, have achieved significant growth, expanding his influence across Canada and the globe while keeping his roots firmly in Kingston.

Brian attributes the early success of their company to a project they did for the United Way in 2006, which helped build their local network. Over the years, BmDodo has grown significantly, and the firm continues to expand its international presence with projects for the United Nations, European Commission, European Forest Institute, and the Tenure Facility, to name just a few.

Brian is optimistic about the future of their business, noting that there is an increased recognition of the importance of



good design for businesses and non-profits alike. The firm is always looking for new opportunities to grow and innovate, while at the same time remaining true to its Kingston roots.

Brian strongly believes in getting involved and giving back to the community. He has sat on several boards, including the Loyalist College Graphic Design Advisory Board, RGD Ontario Board of Directors, Canada-Africa Chamber of Business Board of Directors, and Sustainable Kingston Board of Directors. He is also a member of the Senior Council of Advisors of the Canada-Africa Chamber of Business. Brian has used his skills and experience to support various causes, including promoting Canadian businesses on the African continent through his other company, MAPP Africa Inc.

Starting a business is never easy, but Brian has navigated the challenges of entrepreneurship with grace and determination. He founded BmDodo Strategic Design in 2005, and their exceptional work has earned them numerous awards and accolades in the design industry. Brian is committed to providing exceptional design services to his clients, and his dedication to his craft is evident in every project he works on. He believes that starting a business requires a combination of hard work, creativity, and determination. Brian also believes that it is essential to have a strong support system, both personally and professionally, to help navigate the ups and downs of entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, Brian is an optimist who sees a bright future for his business and the design industry as a whole, which presents exciting opportunities for growth and innovation. He is also excited about the role that technology will play in the design industry and is constantly exploring new tools and techniques to improve the company's services. Brian's commitment to his clients, coupled with his passion for design, ensures that BmDodo Strategic Design will continue to make a significant impact in the industry for years to come.

In addition to his professional achievements, Brian is also a devoted family man. He and his family are actively involved in their community. Brian is passionate about creating a better future for his family and the community he calls home.

A community builder, entrepreneur, and award-winning designer, Brian's commitment to his clients, his passion for design, and his dedication to the community have made him a respected leader in the design industry. Brian's story is an inspiration to anyone who is looking to start a business, make a difference in their community, or pursue their passions. As he continues to grow and innovate, so does his impact on the design industry and the community he serves.



Fast Facts

Born in: Zimbabwe

Business name: BmDodo Strategic Design

Industry: Professional services

Founded: 2005

Website: bmdodo.com

Growing knowledge

Meet Dr. Yafan Huang

As Dr. Yafan Huang completed his high school studies, the field of molecular genetics was still in its early days. But he was fascinated by genetics and could see the potential impact it would have in the future.

After completing both a bachelor's and master's degree at China's Jinan University to deepen his knowledge on the subject, Yafan knew there was more to learn. He turned his attention to North America.

In 1989, Yafan received a scholarship to attend Mount Allison University in New Brunswick and completed a second master's degree in plant biochemistry. Still, he wanted to learn more. He looked into the top university in Canada at the time for plant biology – Queen's University.

"I wanted to continue to advance knowledge in plant metabolism and molecular biology and Queen's University was leading the way at the time," he said.

As his studies progressed, Yafan's dedication and knowledge caught the attention of his professors. While Yafan and his wife, Dr. Jiangxin Wan, a fellow biology graduate of Queen's University, were completing their post-doctoral training in Chicago, they received a call inviting them to join a new company.

"One of my biggest beliefs is that we must use what we learn to create products and technologies that can benefit people and society," Yafan said of his decision



to join Performance Plants. "I like to devote all my energy to making knowledge available."

Performance Plants was founded in 1995 by four Queen's University professors to leverage their research findings, which looked at increasing crop yields. The couple returned to Kingston and began with the company as senior scientist, where they contributed to 86 of Performance Plants' patent applications. Before long, Yafan became the company's Director of Research, then in 2010, its President and Chief Scientific Officer, and in 2022, it's Chief Executive Officer.

"The company's work has been building for a long time," he said. "It takes years to develop strong products in our industry and I believe the next five years will be the most exciting. In the next five years, the products we have invented here in Kingston will be arriving in the hands of the farmers around the world."

Yafan's ascension was part of a push at Performance Plants to commercialize its technology and that decision has paid off. In 2014, Performance Plants received the Agrow Award for Best Industry Collaboration, recognizing its successful commercialization strategy. The company was also a finalist in the research and development pipeline in the international competition.

"We celebrated the awards the Performance Plants way – quietly!" Yafan said. "We're like a big family, and we all share in the success."

Staying in Kingston may not have been Yafan's original plan but it provided the perfect atmosphere for his type of business – a quiet, supportive city with a lot of talent.

"If you are in the technology business, Kingston has this constant influx of talented people thanks to its post-secondary institutions," he said. "Organizations like Kingston Economic Development Corporation have also been very supportive in helping us apply to grants and make connections."

Yafan's success and expertise has not gone unnoticed outside of Kingston. He served as the president of Canadian Association for Plant Biotechnology from 2014 to 2018 and he was Canada's national correspondent with the International Association for Plant Biotechnology. Yafan has also served on the Board of Directors for the Kingston Economic Development Corporation since 2019.

The awards, accolades, and titles are nice to have but for Yafan, it comes back to the impact of the research.

"There's an urgent need to increase food production and find new sources of energy," he says. "If we can enhance crop yields under the increasing threat of global climate volatility, we can better secure our food. We can build on the plant's genetic strengths and turn them into productive plants."



Fast Facts

Born in: Guangzhou, China

Business name: Performance Plants

Industry: Biotechnology

Founded: 1995

Employees: 15

Website: performanceplants.com



Caring for Kingston

Meet Aditi Kumar

Aditi Kumar immigrated to Canada after her wedding and joined her husband in Kingston in 2004. When Aditi arrived, she was unsure what she would do for employment.

To keep busy and meet people as she integrated into Kingston, Aditi volunteered in the physiotherapy department at Providence Manor long-term care home.

"This was my first real connection with the Kingston community," she said. "The residents and therapy staff at Providence Manor were so kind and appreciative of my time and help. So, I decided to take on physiotherapy as a career and always practiced in geriatrics since."

Working in the physiotherapy field required a degree. Since she already lived in Kingston, she applied and was accepted into the Master of Science in Physiotherapy program at Queen's University. She graduated in 2008 and started working in physiotherapy in local care homes shortly after.

Within a few years, Aditi built up her local expertise and connections. While she was on parental leave with her first child, trouble started brewing as provincial funding was reduced for physiotherapy in care homes.

Aditi's husband had encouraged her to open her own business and the couple decided this was the right time to pursue that dream.

"I decided I would fill this gap in the community that the government had created," she said.

She incorporated Repute Homecare in 2013.

Within a few short years, the company grew to 25 employees and contractors, and had developed relationships from Napanee to Smiths Falls and to Glenburnie. They currently serve 200 clients a year.

The reviews from satisfied clients are a big boost to her team's confidence. In their offices, you cannot miss the testimonials and letters of gratitude from clients on the walls. Aditi enjoys working with all clients, but there is a particular segment that she holds near and dear to her heart.

"Every now and then, I get to serve a client that has influenced the community in a huge way," Aditi said. "Working with such clients and serving them makes me proud."

She also gets a sense of pride by hiring newcomers, such as internationally trained nurses and helping them integrate into a diverse Kingston community.

When she is not directly working with clients, Aditi is interviewing more professionals to join the team, preparing wheelchair and walker prescriptions and completing paperwork. She is often on the road travelling Repute's catchment area.

It was not Aditi's plan to stay in Kingston long-term but once she found work, she realized Kingston was the right place for her and a home for her family.

In 2019, she received another sign that Kingston was the right city for her family: a nomination as Young Entrepreneur

of the Year by the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce.

"The nomination reassured me that my team is doing the right things and our efforts are valued by the Kingston community," she said.

She has been especially grateful for the assistance her family received since immigrating.

"Canada is so supportive of immigrants," she said.

"You welcome us with open arms and support us whether it is as simple as learning the language or building your business. If you have to pick a place to move, Canada should be your first choice. I wouldn't want to be in any other country."



Fast Facts

Born in: Chandigarh, India

Business name: Repute Home & Healthcare

Industry: Healthcare

Founded: 2013

Employees: 25, serves 200 clients per year

Website: reputehomecare.com

A taste of Canada

Meet Rakka Rakkappan

Rakka Rakkappan may have found the path to happiness and he is sharing the news with the world.

Rakka is a serial entrepreneur who immigrated from India in 2005. His entrepreneurial journey began when, with support from friends and family, he launched himself into the IT consulting business in Kingston – a location he saw as being the perfect middle ground between Toronto and Ottawa.

Seven years later, after discovering how difficult it can be to land government contracts when you are not a 'preferred vendor', Rakka switched gears and tried his hand at real estate and mortgage lending. It finally dawned on him that the downfall of service businesses is they only work as long as you have time to sell.

"It's easy to make money – the secret is finding a way to make time," he said. "Living in a smaller city like Kingston helps. But if you're a product company, rather than a service company, you can be in any country you want and be as big as you want."

In 2016, he acquired an automotive garage to open Maple Car Wash – partly to service taxis he had acquired and partly to provide office space. That business took on a life of its own and Rakka now offers limousine services and related products.

Still, Rakka's dream was to create a global product brand he and his wife Uma could own. But what to focus on? Inspiration hit during a popular local pastime.



"I was watching a hockey game and drinking a mass-produced beer and I was not really enjoying it," he said. "You shouldn't be chugging your beer. You should be sipping it and enjoying it like you would a glass of wine. It should be an experience."

Thus, Maple Sports Ale was born. The unique beverage is brewed and sold in both Ontario and Belgium, and available for sale in the United States and India. In the future, Rakka hopes to bring the beer to Australia and the United Kingdom though it has already made a trip to the British Isles.

During the 2019 Worldwide Beer Awards held in London, Maple took bronze in the Belgian ale category. "For a two-year-old company, that's pretty good," Rakka said. "We're hoping to up our game and win gold next time. It's not marketed as a premium beer, but those who enjoy it can decide for themselves."

Rakka aims to supplement his Belgian ale with a lager and is expanding into other beverage markets. He has started a bottled water line under the Maple name and is also importing wines from South Africa and Australia.

"We are looking for some space to eventually open a vineyard and brewery in the Kingston or Prince Edward County area and we hope to export Ontario wines in the future," he said.

Rakka has also begun exporting the most Canadian of condiments: maple syrup.

"Obviously, with our name, we wanted to add something sweet to our lineup," he said. "We produce a darker syrup unlike what you would normally find in the grocery store."

Rakka has learned a few lessons during his many business ventures. While not all of his ideas have been successful, he realized he could impart his wisdom to other prospective entrepreneurs to help them avoid some of the costly mistakes he made along the way.

One of his major projects for 2020 was a free educational website called www.lifesquares.ca.

"If I can even save one person some time and money, it's worth the investment for me," Rakka says. "Everyone can be an entrepreneur as long as you have the right drive and as long as you are happy!"



Fast Facts

Born in: India

Business name: Maple Car Wash, Maple Beer Co. & Lifesquares

Industry: Services & alcohol manufacturing

Founded: 2016

Website: reputehomecare.com

Serves 30,000 litres of beer per year

Crunching numbers

Meet Feras Sadek

Feras Sadek never planned on coming to Canada, much less to Kingston. "It's a bit of a funny story," he said.

It was 2003 and Feras, who hails from Syria, had a rewarding job as an accountant in the oil and gas sector. He was married with two children and the family had no plans on leaving the country.

One day, a colleague asked Feras to pick up a Canadian visa application from the embassy across the street from where he lived. As Feras returned home, he discovered the clerk had provided him with an additional blank visa application. After a discussion with his wife, he filled it out and sent it in.

A short while later, his family moved to Calgary.

"Ultimately, we moved for better opportunities for our kids," he said. "Moving was a bit of a challenge, but we settled very quickly, and Calgary became our home."

As the family got acclimatized to Canada, Feras continued his work in the oil and gas sector. However, along the way, Feras saw an opportunity to create something longer lasting.

"I tried several times to start my own business on the side, and those did not work," he said. "That was when I was introduced to Orangetheory Fitness. When I saw the Kingston franchise was available, I looked into Kingston and liked what I saw."

Florida-based Orangetheory Fitness was founded in 2010 and currently boasts over 1,400 studios worldwide, with more than 1,000 studios in North America. Their standard workout is meant to be accessible for anyone with full mobility and it integrates technology to help gym members track their progress.

"Being the first in this market is a bit of a challenge, particularly as Orangetheory Fitness does not have as much brand recognition in eastern Canada," he said. "However, we are getting along well and hope to open a second location in the east end of Kingston in the coming years."

Feras credits the helpful and supportive community in Kingston as something that helped his success and sees strong potential for new businesses in the city.

"When you look at this market, you can see the growth that Kingston is experiencing between Queen's University, the airport renovations, the growth in the east end, the upcoming hospital renovations, and construction everywhere," he said. "I tell other entrepreneurs and investors to just look at the potential and take advantage of the many opportunities in Kingston right now."

Switching from accounting to managing a gym is a dramatic career change, but one of the advantages Feras enjoys is it provides more facetime with his customers.

"Every day there are moments where you were able to help a

member," he said. "Small successes make my day."

Though Feras continues to commute back and forth between Kingston and Calgary, he hopes to settle in Kingston with his family when his children complete university.

"I managed to bring my wife all the way from Syria to Calgary and now I am working on convincing her to move from Calgary to here," he said with a smile.



Fast Facts

Born in: Syria

Business name: Orangetheory Fitness Kingston

Industry: Fitness

Founded: 2018

Employees: 8

Calories burned in 2019: 14,573,179

Website: [orangetheory.com/en-ca/locations/ontario/kingston/500-gardiners-road-unit-6b](https://www.orangetheory.com/en-ca/locations/ontario/kingston/500-gardiners-road-unit-6b)

Freedom never tasted so sweet

Meet the Sourani Family

With a little encouragement from their Canadian friends, the Sourani family was able to establish their business, Alamal Baklava, now three-years old and thriving in the Kingston community.

Omar and Mariam, along with their children Aisha, Khadija, Amal, and Ahmad fled their home country of Syria in 2014, landing in Turkey along with other refugees. In 2017, the Sourani family arrived and resettled in Canada.

"We like Canada because we



saw how people live, and the freedoms, equality, and safety Canadians enjoy," said Aisha. "We were assigned Kingston and decided to stay because it was small, quiet, has great schools, and we thought we could learn our way around more quickly than a big city."

Since arriving to Canada, Aisha, Khadija, and Amal enrolled at St. Lawrence College and Ahmad is studying at Queen's University. Omar and Mariam are focused on increasing their English proficiency. Deciding on a career was challenging with their academic schedules and language barrier.

However, it was during a visit to their home by their friends that the family saw a way to earn money and make connections within the Kingston community through their family recipes.

"We started making traditional Syrian desserts to enjoy at home and with our friends, and they suggested we try selling these desserts," explained Aisha.

In 2017, Alamal Baklava – alamal means hope in Arabic – was created and formally registered as a business in 2019.

The company makes different kinds of baklava, a Mediterranean dessert, which uses phyllo dough, honey, and nuts. They also make date and coconut cookies and bird's nest pastries.

Their first sale took place at the 2017 Kingston Multicultural Arts Festival and ever since, these pastry purveyors continue to make regular appearances at holiday markets, craft fairs and other similar opportunities.

"The people have been very helpful here," said Aisha. "We have been fortunate to receive support from organizations like KEYS Newcomer and Employment Services and the Ontario Government's Summer Company program administered through the Kingston Economic Development Corporation."

As their studies progress, the family is considering whether their fledgling business could blossom into something bigger down the line, such as a small restaurant or café. In the meantime, their advice to other newcomers who are considering to start their own business is simple:

"Use your experiences and go with what you know," Omar said.



Fast Facts

Born in: Syria

Business name: Alamal Baklava

Industry: Food manufacturing

Founded: 2019

Employees: 5

Website: facebook.com/people/Alamal-Baklava/100048479216016/

Be sure to Try the Bird's Nests (Aisha's favourite)



Education for all

Meet Hakeem Subair

Hakeem was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. He did not set out to be an entrepreneur and never really thought about teaching either. In fact, very few people in his community did. Growing up, he regularly heard that teaching was not a respectable profession because teachers never have money and, therefore, he never considered a career in teaching. He was told that he was a smart kid with a bright future who should not waste his time becoming a teacher. So, after graduating from university, he began a career in banking in Lagos.

All of that changed when Hakeem became a parent. In 2008, Hakeem and his wife, Olajumoke Subair, were looking for an appropriate place to leave their daughter, Nadrah, while they were at work. Subair worked for a bank at the time, and his wife was a busy doctor who was often on call.

They were not satisfied with what they found available to them in terms of schools and day cares where they lived in Nigeria. So, they decided to open their own school.

What started with a handful of friends' children quickly blossomed

into a 192-student enterprise. The school, Tiny Tots Osogbo, was thriving except for one major challenge: finding good quality teachers.

Hakeem and his family moved to Canada in 2012 under the Federal Skilled Worker Program (now called the Express Entry) and later pursued a Master of Entrepreneurship and Innovation degree at Queen's University, where he also acquired a Certificate in Social Impact from the Centre for Social Impact. This was the time the challenges they faced while running Tiny Tots Osogbo school in Nigeria started informing the creation of 1 Million Teachers (1MT).

Hakeem is passionate about applying business principles to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing our planet. A passion that grew out of providing more than just financing to businesses, but giving them the tools to enhance their success. A passion that led to him becoming the co-founder and CEO of 1MT.

So what is 1MT?

1MT aims to close the shortage of quality teachers gap by attracting new teachers into the profession, training both the new and existing teachers, and motivating them to keep improving their performance through a comprehensive reward based development program that combines high quality online and classroom based training with mentorship on a scale never attempted before. The web-based component incorporates gamification best practices that engages participants and motivates them to keep learning. We are leveraging machine learning and artificial intelligence to create bespoke training for teachers on a large scale.

1MT has over 10 different partners both in Canada and overseas. In Canada, Queen's University is their leading partners. But outside Canada, 1MT has partnered with Hewlett Packard (HP), Girl Rising, Injini, Azoneta, University of Abidjan, EDVES, TeachUNITED, NECT and many more other partners.

Hakeem says that 1MT is always working to collaborate to find unique solutions to professional development. "For example, On October 15, 2022; Girl Rising, HP, and 1 Million Teachers hosted an official partnership launch event in Abuja, Nigeria to mark the official launch of the program called Mentor-a-Teacher. Under this program, HP employees (mentors) are matched with local teachers participating in 1 Million Teachers' Black Belt program (mentees) to help mentor teachers to become the best they can." This is the kind of work that we do and are always happy to make such contribution to our communities.



Fast Facts

Born in: Lagos, Nigeria

Business name: 1 Million Teachers

Industry: Not-for-profit

Founded: 2018

Employees: 13

Website: 1millionteachers.com



Building a legacy

Meet Ruslan Yakoviychuk

When Ruslan Yakoviychuk moved to Canada in 2005, it was a homecoming of sorts.

During his working years, Ruslan's great-grandfather left Ukraine for greener pastures in Canada, eventually returning to Ukraine twenty years later with enough money to buy land and build a school.

His prosperity was short lived when the Soviet Union took everything from Ruslan's family and sent many of his relatives to work camps. While the money and their property may have been gone, the stories of Canada lingered on and moving to Canada became a dream for Ruslan.

That dream took a step closer to reality in 1992, when Ruslan met Canada's then-Governor General, Ray Hnatyshyn, during a state visit. The Governor General, whose family happened to be from the same region as, inspired him to pursue his dream.

Seven years later, Ruslan found himself working as a teacher in Ukraine but struggled with

the instability and corruption as it tried to re-establish itself as an independent country. Ruslan applied to leave his country, eventually moving to Portugal.

It was in Portugal that Ruslan learned another of the family trades – carpentry—and met his wife. As it turned out, his wife had family in Kingston. As the European economy started to take a turn for the worse in 2005, Ruslan got a Canadian work visa and the couple left Portugal for Canada with just \$500 in their pocket. It was not long before they settled on Kingston as their new home.

"I love the way Kingston is set up with the lakes and the people," he said. "You fall in love the first time you see it."

He worked as a carpenter until he was able to incorporate his own company, RY Contractor in 2009. He has since founded a second company, Legacy Fine Homes.

"One of my first big jobs was to build a clinic downtown for a local doctor, who happened to be my neighbour," he says. "He wanted to open his own clinic but was worried about his student debt. I barely spoke any English at that time, but I quoted for half the amount and half the time of another contractor."

He remembers getting strange looks and a few laughs, especially when he said he had been in business for just three months. Only six weeks later, that changed.

"I finished the job, all four thousand square feet, two weeks early with just the doctor helping me," Ruslan said with a grin. "After that, I had so much work I couldn't keep up. Never judge a book by its cover."

Ruslan shifted gears and slowed down his business in the years since, to ensure he has the time and flexibility to both manage his business and pursue his passions.

In addition to several multimillion-dollar home construction projects throughout the years, Ruslan is involved in the community through groups like the Kingston Homebuilders' Association and the Portuguese Cultural Centre of Kingston. Even during the 2019 federal election, when he ran for political office, Ruslan was busy building several homes including his family's dream home.

Besides his work, political ambitions, and community efforts, Ruslan is raising two school-aged daughters, speaks seven languages, and plays music in his spare time. He plans on releasing his second album, this one in Portuguese, in the coming years. Hard work is central to Ruslan's life philosophy.

"You have to be honest, positive, do a quality job, and never give up," he says.



Fast Facts

Born in: Ukraine

Business name: RY Contractor & Legacy Fine Homes

Industry: Real estate and construction

Founded: 2009

Website: legacyfinehomes.ca

Builds 5 homes per year

The newcomer entrepreneur of the year awards

Newcomers face multiple barriers when settling into life in a new community.

To recognize the contributions made by exceptional and visionary individuals in Kingston, the Kingston Economic Development Corporation is working with Kingston Immigration Partnership to establish the Kingston Newcomer Entrepreneurs Awards.

The awards aim to recognize newcomers born outside of Canada who have arrived in Kingston in the past 10 years and chose to establish and operate their business in Kingston.

Some of the notable contributions to economic development and growth by newcomer entrepreneurs include but are not limited to:

- // Creation of new products and services
- // Creating jobs for others
- // Building businesses that value innovation
- // Boosting demand for local consumer goods
- // Increase Kingston's economic prosperity

Individuals can self-nominate or nominate someone else based on three separate categories.

To be considered a newcomer, the entrepreneur must have been born outside of Canada and established and operate their business in Canada.

Newcomer community builder award

For entrepreneurs who have demonstrated strong commitment and contribution in community service.

Newcomer start-up award

For entrepreneurs whose businesses were established within the past five (5) years.

Inspirational newcomer entrepreneur

For entrepreneurs who have demonstrated great success and vision.

For details on the awards or how to nominate, please visit investkingston.ca/newcomer



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