

KINGSTON

Global Talent Local Business

Celebrating Kingston's Newcomer Entrepreneurs

2024

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Welcome

On behalf of the Kingston Economic Development Corporation and the Kingston Immigration Partnership, we are delighted to recognize the invaluable contributions made by newcomers to our vibrant city. It is our pleasure to come together and celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit and innovation of newcomer entrepreneurs in Kingston.

We understand the challenges that newcomers face when moving to a new country. Starting a business can be an overwhelming experience, especially in an unfamiliar environment. Despite these obstacles, these visionary individuals have significantly contributed to the economic development of Kingston.

Building an inclusive community brings numerous benefits, fostering a sense of belonging and creating an environment conducive to innovation and growth. With this in mind, we celebrate the success of these entrepreneurs and acknowledge their efforts in creating new products and services, generating jobs, boosting local demand 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





Extraordinary commitment, extraordinary coffee

Meet Isabelle & Pierre Tardiveau

Founders & Owners
Sens Café

It must be said: walking into Kingston's SENS Café is like stepping into France, beginning with the cafe's natural stone and black-accented exterior. The interior aesthetic is an inviting blend of exposed brick and stone walls, warm lighting, thoughtfully arranged seating, and open space. By design, a visit to SENS Café is to comfortably slip into the quintessential French cafe lifestyle.

But what makes SENS Café truly stand out, and makes owners Pierre and Isabelle deserved winners of the Newcomer Entrepreneur Award, is the coffee. It's the product of a rare degree of commitment and the pursuit of excellence. Just as slow coffee-making methods produce a remarkable brew, successful entrepreneurship is a thoughtful, all-consuming process. The couple understood that coffee isn't just coffee, and that success in an established market requires more than investment in equipment and location. This led to Pierre spending well over a year researching and absorbing the nuances of café management, while training in Aix-en-Provence at BBS Barista Bartender School. "I went back to school just to learn how to make good coffee, especially specialty coffee." Having left their previous careers behind, they divided the myriad tasks of running

a busy cafe along complementary lines, with Isabelle handling operations and Pierre managing coffee-making and market development. Ready for business, they opened the Barista Café in Annecy, "the pearl of the French Alps," in 2014.

The major assets in any business are the people. As long as you know how you want to do it, and if you have the support of the right people, it just takes time to be successful.

In 2018, now committed entrepreneurs to the last drop and curious about life outside France, Isabelle and Pierre's next move was decidedly bold: they emigrated to Canada. "We sold everything in France to restart something completely new in Canada," says Isabelle. "It was a complete break from our previous life," The benefits were clear: bringing their French-inspired café concept to a new market eager for quality and specialty coffee offered clear advantages. Says Pierre, "We bring something different: a European touch or French touch which I think people really like when coming to SENS." Today, the café is established and growing, with an eye-catching menu featuring a range of specialty coffees — including espressos, lattes, and cappuccinos — crafted from carefully selected beans and expertly prepared. Freshly baked pastries, gourmet sandwiches, and seasonal salads are as enticing as the drinks.

What we like specifically in Canada is the diversity of the people. People come from everywhere; that's something that we really like.

The couple and their three children are now proud members of the community and enthusiastically praise the city, describing it as an ideal size with a wide range of

attractions and activities for families, from shows at the Grand Theatre to sports facilities. Pierre and Isabelle note the helpful role of business services, "In Kingston, you have various organizations that are really efficient and involved in supporting new businesses and newcomers." Local café owners know one another, and fill various geographic and market niches, "Instead of competitors, we are much more colleagues or friends. We share the market, and we work really well together," Pierre says.

Beyond discovering award-winning entrepreneurial success, the Tardiveaus appreciate Kingston's typical warmth, saying, "What surprised us the most when we moved to Kingston was to realize how welcoming the people are."

Fast Facts

Born in: France
Business name: Sens Café
Industry: Food & Beverage
Website: senscafeinc.com

SENS
CAFE





Serial entrepreneur

Meet Norman Musengimana

*Business Development Manager, Start-ups & Entrepreneurship
Kingston Economic Development Corporation*

Norman Musengimana is the quintessential community builder, a self-made leader, and philosophically inclined to see the good in people and the upside of life. He possesses that rare blend of wisdom and perspective found only in people who've thrived in the face of true adversity, gaining know-how and resilience every step of the way. Today, at home in Kingston, he's committed to help others overcome their own obstacles. Making a personal difference for others not only defines Norman's career path, it's his calling.

One thing that I've learned is that there are good people everywhere. If you go looking for the good in people, you will always find it.

Norman brings this energy to Kingston Economic Development as Business Development Manager, Start-Ups and Entrepreneurship. Equipped with the vital insight that solving business problems is significantly more difficult for those facing personal challenges, he seeks to fully understand and connect with the people he meets. This holistic, empathetic approach to solving problems comes naturally and is heartfelt. "More than ever I am inspired and convinced of the power of human connection and the spirit of never giving up." It's a personal, difference-making outlook imbued with a practical upside: communities thrive when its citizens are at their best. It's also where Norman is at his best: opening the door for all

Kingstonians to make the sorts of game-changing civic and economic contributions upon which great communities are built.

Changing the game is a massive motivator for entrepreneurs, particularly when personal passion animates the work. Prosfata, Norman's startup, is designed to help experienced newcomers establish successful careers in Canada. Clients navigate the nuances of the Canadian labor market and workplace culture more quickly and easily after Prosfata matches them to industry experts from their field. BizSkills For Good, a non-profit, addresses a troublesome gap faced by new Canadians and other underrepresented professionals: business acquisition services. He and network partners, like Empowerment Squared in Hamilton, support Black entrepreneurs and shepherd those who would like to acquire businesses through the process of identifying and acquiring established businesses. For clients the rewards are exponential: it's not just about talented people becoming business operators and employers, it's the incalculable joy of self-fulfillment.

What is life without people? It has no meaning.

Coming from a background of well-intentioned individuals who prioritized doing the right thing, even in challenging circumstances, the concept of giving back has become an integral part of Norman's personal philosophy. Finding the good in everyone, he believes, leads to positive network effects that make navigating life's complexities easier. Norman attributes his success to others: the network of extraordinary people he has met across his international journey. It is a true odyssey, including a decade in Kenya, a year in Congo, a return in 2005 to his homeland, Rwanda, and subsequent stays in Dallas-Fort Worth, South Sudan, Belgium, and the UK before finally settling in Kingston, which he now calls home. His view of Kingston warms the heart, "What's very attractive about Kingston is the human side. People are patient. They're kind. They're always smiling. They care enough to ask what you do and what you enjoy." That personal touch is a powerful difference maker in a

world dominated by technology, big-city lifestyles, and limited time. "The moment I am driving back from Toronto, Montreal or Ottawa, and make a turn off the 401, I feel the calmness in Kingston," says Norman. "Less honking, less aggressive driving. This is how I know I am back home. We take these things for granted but they are essential to our productivity and lifestyle."

"I am grateful to have the opportunity to live and serve this community. I am enjoying and living every single second of my life in this community. This is the one thing I have refused to trade for anything because I feel loved, welcome, and empowered not only to serve, but supported to be able to bring my ideas to life. What else can I ask for? Thank you, Kingston!"

Fast Facts

Born in: Rwanda

Business name: Kingston Economic Development;
Prosfata; BizSkills for Good

Industry: Economic Development

Website: prosfata.com

KINGSTON

— Economic Development —





Helping leaders grow & succeed

Meet Patrick Egbunonu

*Acting Dean of Business and Community Services
St. Lawrence College*

Leaders possess a clear vision of a better future. Patrick Egbunonu sees the fusion of technology and entrepreneurship as the great leveler: the path from poverty to prosperity. That outlook—the pursuit of change driven by technology—has taken Patrick along a fascinating path from Nigeria to Canada and to a fulfilling life in Kingston. Now the Acting Dean of Business and Community Services at St. Lawrence College (SLC) and the co-founder and Chair of several organizations, Patrick's long journey hasn't taken him away from the formative experiences of his youth, which continue to animate him to this day.

Some of those experiences resulted from fortunate circumstances. Of Igbo heritage, Patrick grew up in Lagos and spent his teenage and young adult years among predominantly Yoruba people. Enriched by intermingling styles of thought—the Igbo seen as entrepreneurs/innovators and the Yoruba as educators—he cultivated a love of learning and a desire to create. "Entrepreneurship, innovation, and creating and improving things have always been in my DNA," he says. However, various uncertainties often undermined any good fortunes provided by the culture and environment he grew up in. "I've seen poverty. I know what poverty means. I know what it means to go an entire day not knowing where the next meal will come from."

Patrick's talents in science and mathematics provided him a way forward, leading to an undergraduate degree in engineering and

a master's degree in chemical engineering from Queen's, on scholarship. But adjusting to life in a different country isn't easy. Navigating change at the personal level—the shift to life in Canada combined with the self-realization that he truly does see the world through the eyes of an innovator—has left him stronger and clear-eyed about handling life's constant challenges. "When you're different, people might think something is wrong with you. So you have to be okay with yourself. The way you think may be different, how you see things may be different. But nothing is wrong with you. It's okay to carve out a unique path for yourself."

You have to believe in yourself more than anyone else believes in you.

Today, Patrick's willingness to be different and innovative is channelled into digital technology, with a particular focus on analytics, which led to the encouragement to lead the launch of SLC's Business Analytics Graduate Certificate Program in 2017. He stresses the importance of digital transformation and the necessity for Canadian companies to adopt new technologies. He'd like to see improvements in digital and technology adoption, both locally and nationally. "Not every company is properly leveraging digital technologies to improve their processes, products, and business models," he says. "And organizations that aren't leveraging Artificial Intelligence, or planning to, aren't even in the game."

Patrick is also passionate about giving back and has not forgotten his roots. His wife, Cynthia, runs the family business (Informanus Analytics and Artificial Intelligence), which is focused on leveraging technology, analytics and artificial intelligence to help leaders grow and succeed. He's also hoping to leverage technology and analytics to hold leaders more accountable in developing parts of the world. Patrick's focus on change extends to education and digital skills, "We have to rethink what we teach, how we teach, and how

we assess our students to prepare them for a future that is different from the past." Patrick's aims further include encouraging black entrepreneurs, especially newcomers, by emphasizing the opportunities available in Canada. This passion continues to drive him as the Chair of the Black Entrepreneur Ecosystem – South Eastern Ontario. He believes Canada provides people with the chance to come, establish, and grow their businesses on a global scale. It's a positive, future-oriented outlook encapsulating Patrick's belief that technology-driven innovation is the way for people who think differently to change the world, from Kingston to the global stage.

Fast Facts

Born in: Nigeria

Business name: St. Lawrence College

Industry: Education

Website: stlawrencecollege.ca





Bringing life to engineering

Meet Rathie Perumal

CEO/Founder, P.Eng.
Uyir Engineering

Behind every new venture there is a compelling “why,” an animating spirit entrepreneurs bring to every new challenge and opportunity. For Rathie Perumal, founder of Uyir Engineering, the answer lies in the name. Uyir, Tamil for “life,” is what she brings to each project, and what distinguishes her from the pack. It’s a thoughtful, philosophical point of difference, yet fundamentally practical. Contemporary engineering design is people-focused: creating a well-designed space imbued with energy and spirit pays endless dividends for all who use it. Rathie has seized on this concept and made it her business: Uyir Engineering is a life-centric engineering design firm and declaration of her helping-hand worldview.

Rathie, who holds an M.Eng. in Electrical Engineering, formed Uyir in 2020, seeing an opportunity to make a difference in the building construction industry, and willing to do anything it took to achieve success, “I don’t believe in safety nets. I never have,” she says. It truly meant starting from scratch, from finding clients to learning back-office finance. It also meant sorting out which projects to accept, resulting in times where reluctantly saying “no” took precedence over compromise. Clarifying her firm’s brand and values to the market makes finding and working with clients simpler and more rewarding given their shared outlook, “I have beautiful clients. I love them, and I would do anything for them.”

We’re specialized in creating open office workspaces that have a modern touch. Our clients are willing to be creative, willing to take that step into the future.

The road less traveled might be the character-forming one with the greatest rewards, but it’s less traveled for a reason. Rathie arrived in Canada from India in 2010, immediately tackling her Masters. After graduating, Rathie worked in the tool and die industry in Detroit, Windsor, Michigan and Tennessee, her career then taking her across south and central Ontario to Leamington, Chatham, London, and Brampton. Some of the less appealing realities of her engineering field began to reveal themselves. Despite abundant opportunities to make it so, the work often wasn’t creative or fulfilling. But it wasn’t until 2017, and arriving in Kingston, that founding her own firm began to take center stage. Family, from her parents back in India to her brother in Philippines, were supportive but worried: Rathie being the first to tackle entrepreneurship. Further increasing the degree of difficulty, engineering is a highly regulated and male-dominated field. Carving out a niche for a life-centric engineering design firm that develops “conscious engineering designs through our intuitiveness, expansive creativity and robust skills” took next-level tenacity. It is therefore little wonder she says, “I am learning important lessons through it all, learning very important things about myself. I believe I’ve grown spiritually through this process.”

Kingston resonates with Rathie, making her feel at home. That happiness and contentment – which she also feels every time she walks into her home – is perfectly balanced by professional opportunities: Kingston is less well-served by the bigger engineering firms, offering an opportunity to provide services without big-city overhead. Her recommendations for newcomers to the city form an astute list: stay true to your values; prioritize mental and physical

health; be open to learning; seek community and mentorship; be resilient and patient; and embrace uncertainty.

I’ve found mentors who make me feel valued. I’ve never met such gracious women: Having a network like this lets me see what I want to grow into.

Rathie is making it all work: business is strong and revenue is up. Uyir Engineering is established as “one of Canada’s first women-owned global engineering consulting firms.” A Top 40 under 40 Kingston Young Professional, she has built a people-first company from the ground up based on a clear philosophy and set of values. Her creativity and willingness to find answers make her a well-deserved Startup Newcomer Entrepreneur Award winner, and ideally positioned for long-term growth and success. Rathie Perumal is bringing life back to engineering.

Fast Facts

Born in: India
Business name: Uyir Engineering
Industry: Engineering Design
Website: uyir-engineering.com





Community focused entrepreneurship

Meet Tarek Hussein

Pharmacy Manager, Weller Pharmacy
Chief Clinical Officer, MedaKi

Our health means everything. For Tarek Hussein, founder and owner of Weller Pharmacy, everything is about health.

Tarek has worked in pharmacy and pharmaceuticals his entire career, from global pharmaceutical companies to local pharmacies, from undergraduate studies to his Doctor of Pharmacy. So when he says Weller Pharmacy offers the Kingston community the “best personalized pharmaceutical services in a welcoming, inclusive environment,” he knows what he’s talking about.

Weller Pharmacy is a case study in preparation meeting opportunity: with healthcare costs increasing and people’s health needs becoming more personalized, one-size-fits-all, big-box pharmacy stores aren’t the answer. Tarek is positioned right where the market is heading, operating a forward-thinking, ethically focused, community-first independent store designed to meet personal healthcare needs. Having also participated in developing MedaKi, an e-commerce solution that provides independents with the supply-chain scale of national pharmacy chain stores, he is architecting the next generation of pharmacy solutions.

We created an online e-commerce platform designed specifically for independent pharmacies, which has been getting much attention lately. If patients are sitting at home and order items, they will be delivered the same day. Even if I don’t carry it on the shelf, we can still fulfil their request within 48 hours.

Cairo was once home; now it is Kingston (since 2011). However, in 2006, after finishing his MBA at IE Business School in Spain, an epiphany struck when he realized he was more into entrepreneurial and community-focused work than corporate. It was a catalytic moment, sparking Tarek to direct his business and pharmacy know-how toward improving people’s health his way.

When I first arrived in Kingston, I immediately felt connected to the city. The history, waterways, green spaces, and strong sense of community really stood out to me.

Weller Pharmacy opened its doors as an independent pharmacy in 2015, an auspicious moment for Tarek. He had the expertise, location, supplier relationships, and community ties. Most importantly, he had the strategy. The gap was evident, including important concepts Tarek strongly advocates, such as “social prescribing,” which recognizes that a range of social, economic, and environmental factors influence health. Referring patients to non-medical services and community resources to improve their overall well-being is more community-maker than money-maker; Tarek sees this as a logical and ethical extension of the pharmacy business.

Tarek highlights that the Kingstonians’ sense of community and inclusion is fundamental. He notes the city’s welcoming nature, describing locals initiating casual conversations with

newcomers in places like pharmacies or coffee shops. These interactions often begin with casual conversations, leading to offers of help or invitations to participate in various activities.

He emphasizes that newcomers gradually become involved and integrated into the community through these interactions. His own community-oriented approach has led to the Kingston Chamber of Commerce (Past Chair) and KEYS Job Centre (Vice President and Board of Directors).

The community wants you to get involved, participate, and showcase yourself and your business. Kingston allowed me to do what I do, and I am grateful to be recognized for it.

Tarek’s success is based not only on know-how but also on community involvement. He has given, and Kingston has given back. His prescription is succinct when asked for advice for newcomers, with both community and newcomer in mind: “Love Kingston and Canada, and they will love you back.”

Fast Facts

Born in: Egypt
Business name: Weller Pharmacy
Industry: Health & Wellness
Website: wellerpharmacy.com



Dedicated to supporting inclusion

Meet Yu Jier Kou

*Program Coordinator & Communications
Kingston Immigration Partnership at Kingston*

From the moment they arrive, newcomers to Kingston benefit from Yu Jier Kou's advocacy initiatives. As Kingston Immigration Partnership's Program Coordinator, a part of Kingston Community Health Centres, Yu Jier is instrumental to the successful growth and development of the city's newcomer social infrastructure.

Immigration is pivotal to Canada's growth and success. Decades of immigration-friendly initiatives have led to a deserved international reputation as a welcoming and open nation for newcomers. It is a reputation dependent on results, leading to a constant and growing need to provide thoughtful, practical social and economic support. This is doubly true at the local level, where growth-focused cities like Kingston position themselves as destinations for newcomers hailing from a wide variety of backgrounds. Welcoming newcomers and helping them become established is rewarding yet complicated work, requiring dedicated and empathetic professionals like Yu Jier to make the transition to Canadian life as smooth as possible.

Yu Jier's dedication to fostering community and promoting inclusion is genuinely remarkable. She's an organizer of the Newcomer Entrepreneurship Awards, a Kingston Literacy & Skills

Board member, and active member of the Chinese Canadian Association of Kingston and District. Rather than offer advice to newcomers she says, "I would rather spend that time hearing about their experiences. Everyone's coming from such a diverse background and experiencing such diverse challenges and successes that I would be curious to learn more."

"Integration really is a 2-way street. When newcomers come to Canada they naturally have to adapt, they naturally have to change. They might have to learn a new language, learn a new culture; join a new community," says Yu Jier. "We also need to become more welcoming for folks, recognizing, on the part of the community, our need for change." Language is a prime example, given steady growth in Arabic, Mandarin, and Spanish speakers. "Language challenges are big, and really impact newcomers' access to different community services: going for a medical appointment, registering your child for school, or accessing any sort of municipal services." Service providers offering expanded language support can reduce newcomers' sense of dislocation and disconnection, while fostering a sense of community and welcome.

Yu Jier's work also addresses a practical need: accessing services is simpler when the level of inter-service coordination is higher. Simplifying newcomers' acclimatization experience involves strategic coordination and networking among government bodies, community leaders, and other organizations. She mentions the Welcome To Kingston mobile app as an example, which supports newcomers across sixteen languages. The app and other initiatives, like October's forthcoming Welcome Day, are well worth the effort: expanding and strengthening socioeconomic support for newcomers builds Kingston's reputation as welcoming and well-prepared. Kingston Community Health Centres, KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services, and Kingston Economic Development Corporation are among the organizations playing a leading role.

Kingston is smartly positioning itself for long term economic growth, while constructing a warm and welcoming social layer thanks to the efforts of people like Yu Jier Kou, "It's the opportunity to make a lot of change for a lot of people. Whenever you're able to change the system a little bit for the better, that ripples onto different clients and different folks, different newcomers, and really, all people in Kingston."

Fast Facts

Born in: Taiwan

Business name: Kingston Community Health Centres

Industry: Social Services

Website: kchc.ca/weller-avenue/kingston-immigration-partnership



Connect with Kingston Immigration Partnership

263 Weller Ave.
Kingston, ON K7K 2V4

613.544.4661

KINGSTON

— *Economic Development* —

**Kingston Economic
Development Corporation**

366 King Street East, Suite 420
Kingston, Ontario K7K 6Y3

613.544.2725



@investkingston



@investkingston



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