



BUSINESS

LEADER

WELLINGTON COUNTY

RHYZE AWARD

Helping female entrepreneurs with business ownership



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Rhyze award helps female entrepreneurs with business ownership

PAM FANJOY,
FAN/JOY

OLIVIA RUTT WELLINGTON COUNTY

In an opportunity to level the business playing field, Innovation Guelph developed the Rhyze Award, giving female entrepreneurs a chance to pitch their businesses and receive monetary awards.

This year, four winners, three from Wellington County and one from Guelph, took home \$22,000 in cash prizes as well as other items to aid their businesses.

The Rhyze award developed from a conversation between two female entrepreneurs about the challenges they faced.

Kristel Manes, who was with Innovation Guelph at the time and is now executive director of the Business Centre Guelph-

Wellington, was part of the Rhyze beginnings.

Her conversation with a colleague led to a proposal with the federal government's Status of Women, and then to a 20-month project researching issues faced by women trying to start a business. The largest hurdle was funding and financing.

"We interviewed over 1,000 women and regardless of where they came from, who they came from ... they always talked about funding and financing being the hardest thing to achieve," said Manes.

She had her personal story to add, too. As a single mom with a mortgage, car and AAA credit rating, she was still turned down for a small loan from a bank.

The Rhyze award, which is a micro-funding grant, was born out of the research project.

"The results of that research found that women, either women who did start

businesses or women who thought about starting businesses, faced a few key obstacles," said Innovation Guelph executive director Anne Toner Fung.

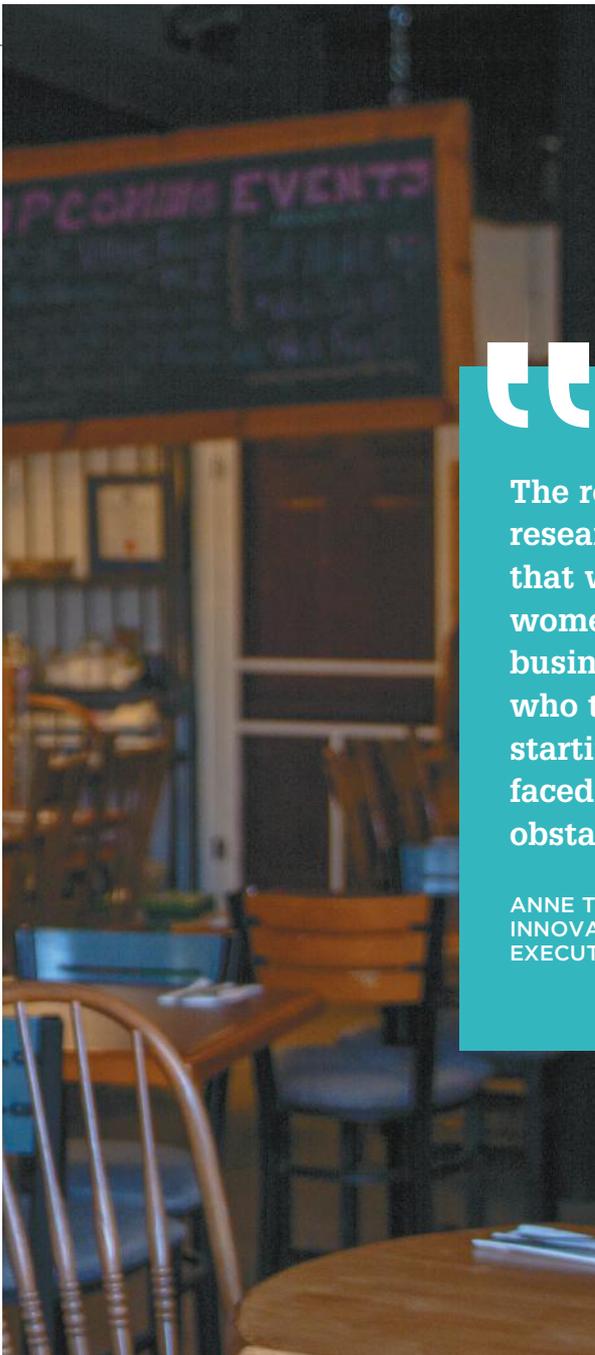
"One ... was access to capital. Even getting a loan from a bank, they were often asked to get a co-signer, when a male in a similar position would not be asked to do that."

The first year, Innovation Guelph crowdfunded for the prize, raising \$30,000 in 45 days. Meridian Credit Union was the first donor, pitching in \$5,000. It has been the primary sponsor ever since. A total of \$22,000 was given out this year, with a matching line of credit from Meridian.

"The amounts have never been large, but they are pivotal at the early stages of a business," said Toner Fung.

Applicants must fill out a form about their business. From there, 10 finalists are chosen. Those finalists are sent to a pitch

PHOTOS: P. 6 OLIVIA RUTT; P. 7 SUBMITTED



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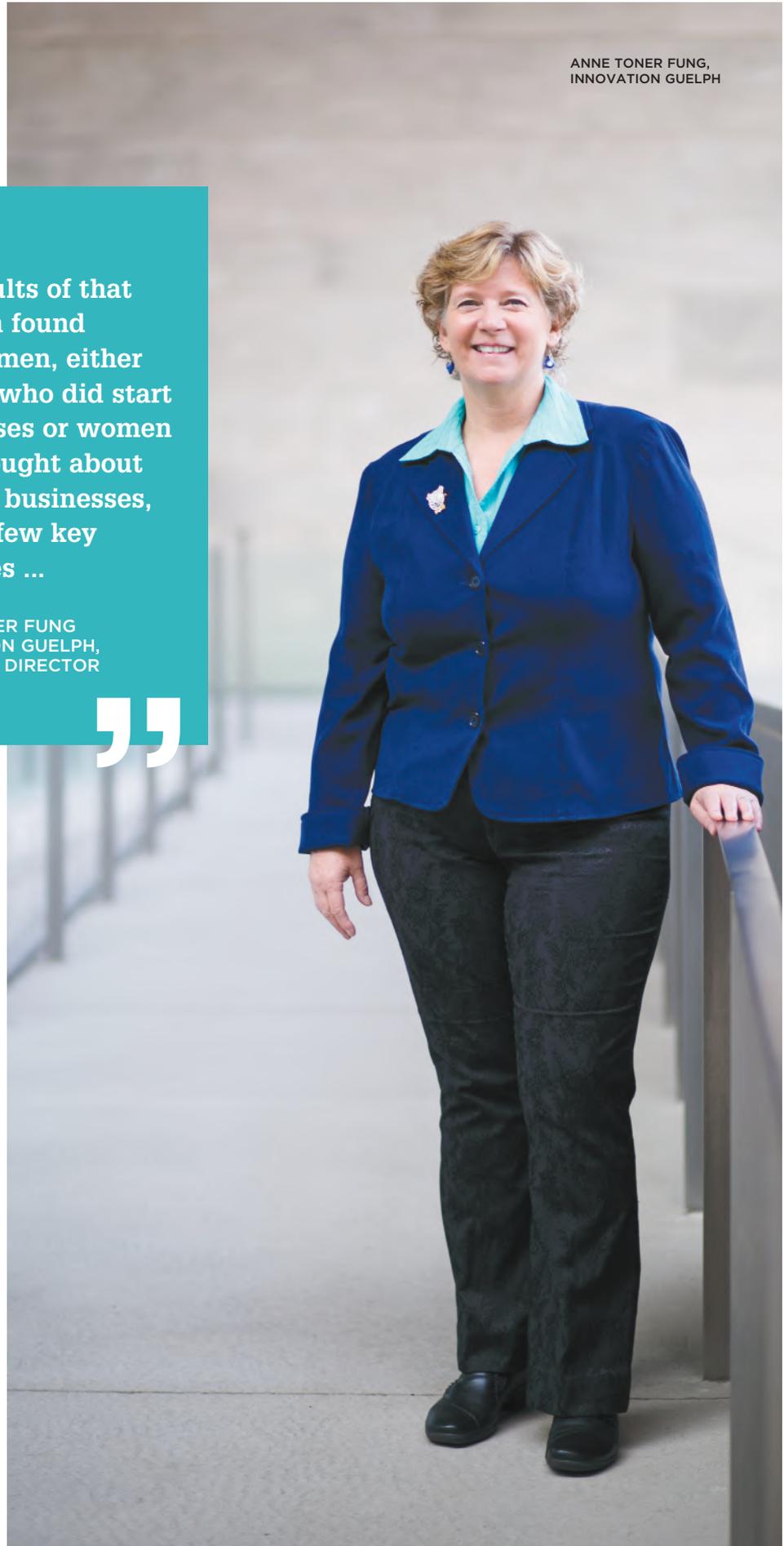
camp, where they learn how to present their pitch for the grant money. Each of the finalists was given a one-year membership to the Company of Women.

At an event in June, four winners were chosen from the finalists, who pitched their ideas to a panel of industry judges.

Julia Kitras received \$10,000, Pam Fanjoy received \$5,000, Caitlin Hall received \$4,000 and Annie Guimond received \$3,000. They were also awarded a matching line of credit from Meridian and a video business profile by Katie Green of Local Ladies.

FILLING A VOID IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Julia Kitras knew she wanted to fill a void with her new business, No Guff Automotive in Guelph. In fact, it was the entire reason she became a mechanic.



ANNE TONER FUNG,
INNOVATION GUELPH

“

Obviously being self-employed, you don't have maternity leave, you don't have benefits like that, and in some ways, it's a conducive environment to have a baby with you, but also in other ways it's not ... we're figuring it out.

CAITLIN HALL
REROOT FARMS IN MINTO

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“The new business is six years in the making and is why I got into becoming a mechanic, to open my own business exclusively geared towards women or people who feel like they haven't gotten the service that they've been looking for as someone who doesn't know about cars or vehicles,” she said.

Hers will be Guelph's first night garage.

Having switched career paths from industrial design a number of years ago, Kitras has been apprenticing at Vinnie's Mr. Fix-it in Guelph.

In October, she was expecting her dream of opening her own shop to become a reality.

“It's a full service, bumper-to-bumper automotive service and it should be by then a ministry vehicle inspection station,” she said.

Kitras' Rhyze award of \$10,000 will help with start-up costs, purchasing a tire machine and balancer, equipment upgrades, tools to become a certified ministry vehicle inspection station and software to help with accounting and invoicing.

But she almost didn't apply.

“It was hectic ... I had a lot of ideas for the vision of the company, but ... all the ducks weren't in a row yet. And then I was like, ‘you know, heck with it,’” she said.

Kitras said being a female in the automotive mechanic industry has its “peaks and valleys,” and some people have confused her for a receptionist.

But she said she has also received a lot of positive reaction to her business.

“I would say overall, a very positive experience and ... you really learn about just how much strength, how much perseverance and how much you're willing to take to go for what you want,” she said.

She also found inspiration in the “badass”

women who are part of the Rhyze award.

“It was really a positive experience to be around women who have made the choice that they are going to run their own businesses, and they're always trying to grow it and they're always trying to progress,” she said.

FROM RESTAURANT TO COMMUNITY HUB

Chef Pam Fanjoy has been running a restaurant in the Town of Erin for five years. She was located in the village of Erin under the name The Friendly Chef, and two years ago she moved to Hillsburgh and rebranded to Fan/Joy.

The rebranding was part of a “fuel injection grant” project from Innovation Guelph, and the money she received from the Rhyze award will help execute some of those goals.

“For me, being in this new building, it's been a real labour of love to just get the inside of the building renovated and up to speed,” said Fanjoy.

The building, an old Chevrolet dealership, has a historical plaque commemorating one of the first indoor dealerships in Canada.

“I specifically went after the Rhyze award to be able to use those funds to reface the front of the building, make it more welcoming and to engage local youth in helping to make this a big part of the community,” she said.

“This restaurant is more than just a restaurant; it's really my passion to make it into a community hub.”

She will be using her grant money to paint, install lighting and signage, construct a patio and build a living wall.

“It was exciting; it certainly felt like an achievement as well as a recognition,” Fanjoy said of the Rhyze award.

“It was really a powerful experience, to be able to be in a room with other female entrepreneurs that were at the startup stage in their business.”

NEW CHALLENGES FOR NEW MOM

Caitlin Hall has been running Reroot Farms in Minto for eight and a half years. She has 70 acres, five of which are in various stages of vegetable production. There is also a herd of black Angus cattle, Dorper sheep, Berkshire pigs and chickens.

She is also restarting her beehive after losing 10 hives last winter.

“Most of our business is growing certified organic vegetables, and we sell it through our CSA (community supported agriculture) program,” said Hall, adding anything extra is sold at a few different markets.

“Over the years, we've also been working on the educational component of agriculture,” she said.



ANNIE GUIMOND,
GREEN BICYCLE FARMS

PHOTOS: OLIVIA RUIT

This year was the first Hall had heard of the Rhyze award.

“I was pleasantly surprised that we were one of the 10 finalists and one of the four award winners,” she said.

“There’s not very much money for agricultural grants or awards or loans, especially with this type of agriculture.”

She said she has used her \$4,000 grant and line of credit for a couple of projects around the farm, including a bed and breakfast.

“We have this building; the upstairs is unfinished right now, but my plan is to finish it into a little apartment so we can do some type of farm experience bed and breakfast,” she said.

Hall said the Rhyze award was a great experience, especially meeting other moms who own businesses. Hall’s daughter Ivy was born in November and Hall is getting used to working and caring for a child.

“Obviously being self-employed, you don’t have maternity leave, you don’t have benefits like that, and in some ways, it’s a conducive environment to have a baby with you, but ... in other ways it’s not,” she said.

“We’re figuring it out.”

She found others doing just that with the Rhyze award.

“It was neat too, because a lot of the other Rhyze finalists talked about how their kids factored into their business lives and it’s a lot more of a consideration for women than it is for men, even still,” she said.

“It’s nice that women are still finding ways to start businesses, even with kids in tow.”

Hall said Minto and Wellington County are great places for her business.

“Wellington County is a pretty supportive place for women entrepreneurs,” she said.

MOM FINDS STRENGTH IN COMMUNITY

Annie Guimond will be using her award money to expand her flower and vegetable business. She started Green Bicycle Farms, located in Guelph-Eramosa, in 2017.

The money she received will be used to populate a new flower bed on her 10-acre property exclusively for weddings. She will also be tearing down an old shed to create a walk-in cooler for flowers and vegetables.

“I’m using some techniques that is all about regenerative agriculture, so there’s no sprays, no herbicides, no fungicides,” she said.

Guimond said she was nervous applying for the Rhyze award, but so excited to find out

she was one of the finalists.

“Once I got there, the energy of all the finalists ... everybody was so friendly, and everybody was really backing each other, and I didn’t feel nervous at all after that. It was great to be all together,” she said.

Manes story about being a single mother struck home for Guimond, who was once a single mother too.

“We have to prove ourselves more, and I thought this was amazing that it was an opportunity for women to shine and show that we’re able to do that kind of stuff too,” she said.

Guimond added there is a lot of work to be done for females to be seen as owners of companies in industries that require physical labour, but the Rhyze award was a good start.

“It was really encouraging, and it was really inspiring, too, to see other women trying to do their thing,” she said.

Having three boys, she also felt encouraged by the other mothers in the Rhyze community.

“For women entrepreneurs, there’s this thing that if you want a family, you have to try to have a balance between your business and your family,” she said.

“It was great to see that we had some of the same concerns and the same path in a way.”

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CAITLIN HALL,
REROOT FARMS