

Business Person of the Year Award 2021

Karen Baillie of Elegant Steps

Presented by:



The BDC Business Person of the Year Award acknowledges a founder, owner, CEO, president or manager who has achieved significant success in his or her business showing strong leadership skills and business acumen contributing to the growth of the business. The recipient has made outstanding contributions to the community, has an innovative spirit and has demonstrated positive social and/or economic impact on the region, while creating new employment opportunities.

This year we are pleased to honour the contributions of Karen Baillie, of Elegant Steps.

The community-minded entrepreneur began her business journey in the fall of 1992, opening Elegant Steps footwear store on Inglis Street. She quickly out grew the original location and moved to a second a couple doors down, then in 2004 she expanded into a third location on the opposite side of the street, at 58 Inglis, drawing customers from across the Maritimes.

This expansion allowed for the addition of full clothing lines, to dress women from head to toe, including many Canadian made brands, accessories and prom needs. In October 2017, Karen expanded her product line again adding the Merle Norman Skin Care and Cosmetics line and branched out to new markets by opening a second location in the fall of 2019, a discount and consignment store, in New Glasgow on Archimedes Street.

Next year, Elegant Steps will mark 30 years in the community under Baillie's leadership.

The COVID-19 pandemic, that began here in the spring of 2020, has certainly had an impact on the small, family-owned business but Karen said they were able to adapt to public health protocols while continuing to service clients. Under the circumstances, staff numbers shifted from 11 previous to the pandemic to six currently.

At the onset of the pandemic, she wondered how they were going to reach customers to ensure the business would "survive." She quickly transitioned her store to an online market place and ramped up social media presence which customers embraced.

Baillie said there were many days during the pandemic she was out delivering packages to customers. She was pleased to offer this personal touch as she considers each of them friends.

She said there are generations of families that come to store, not just to shop but to visit. She loves the relationship with her customers which makes every day an enjoyable one.

Her advice for new entrepreneurs is to get help for all aspects of your business and do it early on. “You can’t afford not to do it,” she said, adding there are many resources available to assist new businesses.

Her other piece of advice, one she has demonstrated in a great way, is to, “Get on boards and be involved in your community. Make connections. That goes a long way.”

Baillie is a firm believer in supporting local and has always made giving back to her community a priority. With the exception of 2020, she hosted four fashion shows a year with the proceeds going to local charities. Some of the past recipients were: Colchester East Hants Hospital Foundation, Third Place Transition House, Maggie’s Place, ALS Society of Canada, MS Society of Canada, Alzheimer Society of Canada, Colchester Community Workshops, Colchester East Hants Hospice Society and Canadian Mental Health Association.

Despite the pandemic, Baillie wanted to continue to offer support to her community and held a virtual fashion show in the fall raising \$5,000 for Grow Hope Nova Scotia by donating a percentage of the sales. They recently hosted a spring show in support of the community transition unit at the Colchester East Hants Hospital. The store also recently held a social media like and share contest on Facebook in support of the Rotary’s We Rise Again event.

For the past four years Baillie has also coordinated a drop-off program providing hundreds of coats to people in need and has donated clothing to the NSCC student clothing room.

She is a Past President and former board member of the Downtown Truro Partnership, funder of the Truro Colchester Partnership for Economic Prosperity, Vice-President of the Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce, Futureworx board member, member of the Colchester Investment Committee for CBDC NoBL, member of the Women in Wellness committee, past member of 100 Women Who Care Truro, Co-founder of 100 Women Who Care Pictou County, along with serving on other community committees.

Tonight, the Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce is pleased to honour Karen Baillie of Elegant Steps with the BDC Business Person of the Year Award.