

Entrepreneurs help women "get back in the business of living" with Gorgeous You



By Brock Weir

Bra shopping was always an uncomfortable experience for Aurora's Lori Futterer.

It was uncomfortable, impersonal, and sometimes just plainly frustrating experience ? but, just over 10 years ago, this frustration was felt on a whole other level.

Aged just 37, the young mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, undergoing a double mastectomy and opting against reconstructive surgery.

?I found there was not a lot of selection for young women like myself who still want pretty bras and bathing suits that fit properly, and you don't have to pay through the nose for,? says Ms. Futterer. ?The shopping experience is very clinical, a lot of women have to buy their products in medical supply shops and, as young women, it can be very frustrating. We always say cancer is hard enough; shopping for underwear, bras and bathing suits shouldn't have to be.?

So, Ms. Futterer, along with friend and business partner Kendra Palazzi, who lost her own mother to breast cancer, set out to make a difference and, in doing so, they may have become gamechangers.

Last summer, the Aurora duo launched Gorgeous You, a business with a mission to help cancer-surviving women ?take back their feminine beauty, power and strength.?

?Shopping for a bra is uncomfortable regardless, but when you're somebody like me who is going in and doesn't have breasts and a prosthetic, it is a really awful experience,? says Ms. Futterer. ?We wanted to bring women a shopping experience where you could shop from the comfort of your own home. Our vision is women can fill up their carts, bring it home, try it on and not feel that awful feeling of being in an environment that just brings back all sorts of awful feelings and memories.?

While Futterer and Palazzi have set out to empower women they are both, in turn, powered by their own personal experienced. They know first-hand the challenges faced by cancer survivors and agree they want to ?help women take back what is rightfully theirs ? dignity, femininity, style and comfort.?

Since its inception, Gorgeous You has amassed an impressive ? and growing ? line of products ranging from bras, underwear, swimsuits and hats, to prosthetics, to therapeutic treatments to help women pre-op and post-op.

?We have got about a dozen manufacturers right now and a good chunk of them are survivors supporting survivors because there just wasn't what they wanted readily available in the marketplace,? says Kendra. ?They created it, they designed it, they manufactured it. A lot of the options we're bringing to the Canadian marketplace are unique to Canada and not readily available. We're not just breast cancer, we're women's cancers. If you've had ovarian cancer, you're not going to need a mastectomy bra, but there are other products on the site that will help you through the treatment and beyond.?

Adds Lori: ?We have found there are two distinct targets: we have women like myself, where we sell a lot of bras and bathing suits. Then we have people who are supporting their loved ones who are going through cancer treatment. I remember all the flowers and

all the food and everything, but flowers die and you're not that hungry when you're going through chemo. We have really cultivated a gift section that is really thoughtful ? ?

?And helps guide the loving hand towards some nice suggestions,? says Kendra.

As Gorgeous You goes from strength to strength, the women are heartened every day by the very personal feedback that continues to roll in.

Just before speaking to The Auroran on Friday, for instance, they received a note from a customer who was buying product for a friend on her own personal cancer journey. Appearance was still very important to the friend and they needed quick turnaround time. Together, they made it work, going into overdrive to get the package off on time ? personally wrapped with bows, tissue paper, and a handwritten note.

?I remember a woman a couple of months ago we helped, a young mother,? recalls Ms. Futterer. ?She had a mastectomy eight years ago and had not put on a bathing suit in those eight years. She called, we had some conversations, and after her bathing suit arrived, she called in tears to say, ?I am going to be able to go to the beach this summer with my eight and 10 year old and feel secure and beautiful. I know it is just a bathing suit, but this is sort of life-changing for me.' I was in tears as she shared that with me.?

Then, adds Kendra, there was a customer in a more remote Ontario community who did not have ready access to stores to suit her needs and, since her single mastectomy, had been filling the void with sports socks.

?It was a gamechanging for her. She walked in one way, we got her set up, and she left the house a completely different woman. It is not about a prosthetic, it is not about a bra, it's not about a bathing suit ? it is about a feeling. They are getting back to the business of living.?

Gorgeous You, from the humble beginnings of providing a service to women they wish they had when they were going through their respective journeys, as survivor and caregiver, has grown to an online business with customers throughout Canada and the United States, boasting products from around the globe, and providing customized service to make sure customers get the right fit the first time.

And, on top of that, portions from each sale are donated to Rethink Breast Cancer, a non-profit which supports young women in their 20s and 30s waging their own brave battles.

For more on Gorgeous You ? and for more with Lori Futterer and Kendra Palazzi ? visit gorgeousyou.ca.