

Local mom turns sticky solution into "Easy Peasy" success



By Brock Weir

As a mom of three, Andrea Winarski had no shortage of pant knees to patch, particularly when it came to her two hockey-loving boys.

And, as luck would have it, she had plenty of willing hands ? and knees ? close by to keep her on her toes when she came up with a sticky solution to an age-old problem.

Ms. Winarski's idea has taken her from the kitchen table, to a design space on Don Hillock Drive, and now as a finalist for the upcoming Mompreneur Award of Excellence.

Mompreneurs is a Canada-wide organization dedicated to supporting the endeavours and education of women across the country, acting as a resource and network for women entrepreneurs across many sectors.

With the awards winners slated to be announced in Toronto next month, Ms. Winarski is nominated for her business venture Easy Peasy Patches, which are permanent peel-and-stick fabric patches which need no ironing or sewing and, thanks to plenty of trial and error on Ms. Winarski's part, will stay on through the washer, dryer, and even the dishwasher.

?It started six years ago and, at the time, my boys were five and four, and my daughter was two-and-a-half,? says Ms. Winarski. ?My boys ripped the knees in their pants all the time, so I wanted a quick and easy solution to fix their clothing.?

Looking for that easy solution, she only found embroidered patches needing some needle and thread and iron-on patches, which have their own challenges, so Ms. Winarski saw an opportunity.

?I was working full time and I thought, why not take a half-an-hour every week and set down to doing this,? she says. ?I ordered a bunch of adhesives over the internet, ordered a bunch of fabrics and played around with everything. I settled on the third fabric I used, put the patches on my son's hockey pads and had them slide down the driveway to see how they would work. It took a good 18 months of trial and error to find a good combination and even after I launched it I changed the fabric two more times.?

The days of taking just a half-hour each week to focus on the product are long gone.

Taking what she describes as ?baby steps? in increasing her focus on the product, and ultimately the business, she took her Easy Peasy Patches to the Toronto Toy Fair about a year into her venture. It was there she met her first distributor which quickly turned things from being just a hobby to a brand-new full-time job.

As the business continues to grow, the kids are still very much a part of the creative process. When her kids were younger, the designs they suggested were all about monsters. Now, as they grow up and become more sophisticated, their design tastes are leaning more towards emojis, with the ?poop? emoji becoming something of a bestseller on the Easy Peasy Patches website.

Seeing how kids have coloured, cut and shaped the patches to suit their needs, Ms. Winarski has also developed craft packs to allow imaginations run wild.

Fun has also been blended with practicality, having recently launched fun patches for kids to sport on their backpacks alerting people to their allergies, as well as reflective patches for bikes and helmets.

?I guess I am artistic, but I am not necessarily the most crafty person,? Ms. Winarski laughs on the group creative process. ?My

radar has always been on the practical part of it, but people have sent me pictures of using them on inflatables at cottages, or screen doors, car interiors and snow pants. One little boy started a branch of using them for adaptable aids. He has a feeding tube and his mother made an adaptation and just cut it and put it around the hole. He has a multitude of challenges, but to see them on his wheelchair is neat to see.?

While Ms. Winarski says she would still like Easy Peasy Patches to make inroads into retail, she says her nomination for the Mompreneur Award of Excellence has given her even more of a focus on the future.

?It puts the spotlight on you!? she says. ?There are so many ways this product can go. It makes me want to put my best foot forward and get the idea out, so it does up your game and it is a good energy boost. There have been some really great people I have admired who have won in the past, so I always think the company you keep tells a lot. It is exciting to be with the people with whom I have been nominated.

?Everyone has a different business ? one woman makes tutus, another has a gourmet cooking school. It is an honour ? and it is exciting to share it with the kids. My kids have been a part of it all along, from inspiring the product, they do the modelling, they package it for me, and when the nomination came in, they were probably more excited than anybody!?