

There's plenty of comfort and support at Melons et Clémentines

BY MARLENE EISNER

What's totally natural, environmentally friendly, has long-term health benefits and 90 percent of Canadian women do it?

If you said breastfeeding, you win the booby prize.

What could be simpler? Nursing is nature's most perfect answer to a healthy beginning to life; it's an easy-to-access, nutritionally sound feeding system. Yet for many women, the process can be difficult. Such was the case with Marie-Maude Grenier, co-owner with Renée Boudreau of Melons et Clémentines, a store dedicated to providing moms with everything they need for a successful —and comfortable — breastfeeding experience.

"I never had doubts about nursing, but with my second child, it was very hard. The first week was very hard," said Grenier, who met Boudreau in 2006 while volunteering at Nourri-source, a community based breastfeeding support group.

Three years later, as their friendship and their families grew (they each had another baby), the two women began investigating the possibility of quitting their jobs and going into business together. Grenier worked in film for 15 years, first as a dresser and then as an assistant costume



From left, Melons et Clémentines co-owners Marie-Maude Grenier and Renée Boudreau.

Photo: Karla Kaminski

designer. But the hours were very long, and with her partner working in the same industry, 16-to 18-hour days with two little children just wasn't feasible.

"The job was very demanding, very stressful," said Grenier. She began to think about opening a business that sold some kind of eco-product, such as cloth diapers. That idea was shelved when she became pregnant with her second child.

When Boudreau was let go from her job as a sales rep for a clothing company, the time seemed ripe to get serious.

"I was downsized when I was on mat leave with my second child," she said. "It

was a good shove that we needed to get this off the ground."

In April 2009 the two women shook hands on the deal and the real work began. For the next 12 months, they researched the topic of breastfeeding, sourced products and visited other cities to see what was out there. They applied for, and received support from, the Soutiens au jeunes entrepreneurs (SAJE) and the Corporation de développement économique communautaire (CDEC), which offered 40 hours of business courses, as well as financial backing.

"There are some conditions, such as you have to be on Employment Insurance or mat leave to apply," explained Boudreau of the procedure that included a number of visits in front of a board to

present the business plan.

"They offer you a salary of \$18,000 a year each, which you receive like EI every two weeks, but you can't have any other employment in addition to that."

Last April, they opened 2,000 square feet of space on Sherbrooke St., a few blocks west of Marcil Ave. Following The World Health Organization's (WHO) preferred standard of six months of exclusive breastfeeding for optimum baby health, Grenier and Boudreau want to provide everything a nursing mom needs to adhere to that guideline. They offer a clothing boutique with a broad range of attractive nursing tops that pull up, pull down or to the side, as well as blankets, nursing bras, baby carriers and breast pumps to purchase or rent.

The bright, spacious store is also a free drop-in centre where nursing moms can come to feed their babies, socialize and gain support. There are workshops on breastfeeding and infant massage, homeopathy in breastfeeding, child development, and consultations with lactation specialists. A small café adds to the relaxed and friendly ambience.

Boudreau says the response has been very positive and with 200 people on an email list, and 500 Facebook fans, the future is looking good.

"We're definitely super encouraged. There have been a lot of open arms that have welcomed us in the community."

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larger selection of ecological and fair-trade products ranging from natural soaps to local foods, Hughes said the co-op has been gaining 2.5 members a day, compared to 1.5 before the renovations. Paying \$10 for a lifetime membership, members get a discount on products, receive a regular newsletter and can vote during the annual meeting.

The aim, according to the co-op's web-

site, is to provide ecological solutions for responsible consumption in the first environmental solidarity co-op in Canada.

"It really has been a positive force in the neighbourhood," said Hughes.

Pat Powers agrees. An NDGer since 1977 and regular customer for several years, Powers said the co-op is place of connection. When asked why he keeps coming back, the retired Dawson College professor replied with a smile: "The community feel and the espresso."

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