

Weathering the learning curve

Westboro's West End Kids has been an area fixture for nearly two decades, and to owner (and mom) Sheba Schmidt's delight, business is booming along with the neighbourhood

By Jennifer Cox

What began as a boutique shop in the once-quiet area of Westboro has blossomed into a national name that has grown as quickly as its surrounding neighbourhood.

With a store situated in a prime Ottawa location and a strong online presence, West End Kids – owned by Sheba Schmidt – is quickly becoming one of the most popular destinations for children's clothing and outerwear.

Both Schmidt and her husband Gordie have a long history of working in apparel and with children.

Schmidt had also worked as a school teacher before their son Benjamin was born in 1988.

In 1993, Gordie decided to retire when their son was five, and the family took a two-year break, travelling to Europe, Israel and the West Coast in search of a possible lifestyle change.

"We decided that we loved Ottawa and I felt that Ottawa needed a great kids store. Gordie believed that Westboro would be perfect and the location was ideal – centrally located, easily accessible and the rent was affordable," said Schmidt.

"Eighteen years later, West End Kids is still at the same location in the ever-growing hub of Westboro Village."

As Westboro transformed, so did West End Kids – instead of simply being a boutique for children's clothing, it evolved into a one-stop shop for year-round weather protection. They then took their business online as well.

"In 2007, we decided it was time to grow but we had no desire to open another brick and mortar store – we both believed that online shopping was the next step, and I am

proud to say that www.westendkids.ca is fulfilling our expectations," said Schmidt.

"Our mission is to recreate the in-store experience online and to have the same consumer confidence as we have achieved in-store."

They now sell thousands of outerwear pieces, accessories and footwear in their store and across Canada every year.



And Sheba is enthusiastic about working with children's apparel. "Kids make me smile and laugh, and that makes me feel good," she said.

"The type of products we sell, having parents thank us for making their shopping experience so easy, continues to make me passionate about West End Kids.

"But, at the end of the day, it is my husband Gordie that continually inspires me to continue in the fashion that I do and [gives me] the drive to be on top of our industry's trends."

Being a mom has also helped this entrepreneur succeed. "Having a child opens a whole new learning experience – I think it would be a huge challenge to have a kid-driven business without being a parent," she said. "It's a learning curve ... and I'm still learning."

Her son, Benjamin, has grown up in West End Kids and is now managing the store, and has become active in buying as well. "Being an interactive multimedia developer and graphic designer, Benjamin's knowledge in regard to our online presence is invaluable," she said.

"The growth potential of Westendkids.ca is unlimited." 



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