

MY PATHSTONE STORY: ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Towards the end of 2018, in anticipation of our 50th anniversary this year, PathStone put out a call to former program participants to share their stories through our new online feedback portal, [My PathStone Story](#). Wonderful stories began coming in and one in particular stood out. Michele (one L) Brown shared, "Three and a half years into owning my own salon and killing it! Better than I could have ever imagined. Five stylists, including myself, have created a wonderful space to do amazing work.

Thank you, PathStone for believing in my dream and helping me get it started." We were so taken by Michele's enthusiasm, we reached out to her to learn more about her story. It is inspiring and hopeful and we are proud to be a part of Michele's journey to personal success.

At age 20, Michele was a single mom with a 6-month old son diagnosed with a chronic health issue. She worked as a receptionist at Supercuts. After a promotion to shift manager, she realized her only opportunity for upward mobility was to become a stylist, so she enrolled in cosmetology school and embarked on an 8-month training program. Due to her son's illness, it took Michele nearly two years to complete cosmetology school. Michele remembers the cosmetology director at the school telling her, "You are never going to be a hairdresser." But Michele was determined to complete her training and returned to Supercuts to work as a trainee stylist. As fate would have it, Supercuts did not have a training program for new stylists so they referred her to the Harry Bruno Salon to work as an assistant to Michael Shadders. "I ended up working with Michael for 6 years. He became my mentor. Michael sent me to Vidal Sasson. I did advanced cutting in Toronto. I took every class that I could possibly get to and Michael was just great!" Michael also helped Michele develop her confidence and interpersonal skills which helped her interact with her now very affluent clientele. Under her mentor, Michele's career as a stylist flourished and she became a pro in her own rights.

By the time she turned 40, Michele had married and remarried, bought a house, had two more children and worked a combined 20 years at several prestigious salons. That's when she decided it was time to take all she had learned and forge her own path in the hair and beauty industry. She and her husband bought a residential mixed-use property on Park Avenue. It was already a salon and a home so ideal for her purposes. They bought the house, moved their family upstairs and started remodeling the first floor that would become her salon. During the remodel, a family friend suggested Michele try seeking a small business loan through PathStone Enterprise Center, (PECI). "I was too intimidated to go to a bank because I knew my credit wasn't fantastic. I didn't know that I wanted to open a salon until I decided to open a salon, you know. I didn't spend years squirreling away money."



During the next six months, Michele worked with a PECI business loan development officer who helped her through the process of preparing for her loan review. When the day finally came to be heard by the PECI board, Michele was excited and nervous. Michele shared, "They were so welcoming! They were engaging

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and they were excited! I was very nervous going into it, but when I left, I felt like I could have stayed there all afternoon. But I also wanted them to hurry up and vote so I could get my answer!"

Michele's loan was approved and she closed on her loan in June 2015 and opened OneLSalon on Park Avenue. She currently has several stylists who rent space from her. "They are not just working in my salon. I want them to feel ownership in it too. They are three women who are running their business within my business. We consciously chose to work together that way." Michele decorated and designed the spaces herself and as you walk through OneLSalon, you see her personality and creativity reflected in every little detail.

Michele has big plans for the future which include expanding her business at the current location and eventually starting a franchise of what she calls "blow out bars" where customers can go for a quick haircut or a quick blowout. Asked if she would return to PathStone for a second loan to expand her business, Michele gave a resounding "yes!" "I would definitely go back to PathStone for another loan. I feel like they'd be happy to give me another loan. The traditional banking is so intimidating, it's so impersonal." For Michele owning her own salon is so much bigger than being a business owner. "It's given me the platform and the confidence to go out there and to network and be involved in the community and be a part of what's going on." Michele is active in her community and donates time and services to several annual community fundraisers.

Michele's advice to folks thinking about starting their own business is, "Think bigger than you are, because you will grow past your first idea quickly. The other thing is get a really good accountant!"

For more information on PECEI's small business loan program visit <http://www.psecei.org/> or contact John Felice, director of business lending for PECEI at (585) 340-3304.

