

Small Business Spotlight:

Sarah Ridgway | Owner

Rain Forest Fabrics, Est. 2019

Life Story

Growing up, Sarah was always around fabric and she started to sew when she was eight. She took inspiration from her grandmother who could do everything from knit to quilt to pluck a chicken. Her grandmother gave Sarah her first sewing machine and she hasn't stopped sewing since. Sarah bought the local fabric store she had been working at from the owner in 2019 and Rain Forest Fabric was born. One year later the building the store was in burned to the ground. Now she has started from scratch to bring Rain Forest Fabrics back from the ashes.

What motivated you to start your own business?

I worked at the store since it opened. After I started doing more of the management duties, I asked the owner if I could buy it from her. I wanted to bring my own direction to the store. My dream was to be able to support other people in making creations. Now, designing the store in a new space I have been able to highlight local artists and get support from my community of tradespeople to realize even more of those dreams.

How has your business been impacted by, and adapted to, COVID-19?

We realized early on in the pandemic that masks were going to be important. So, we worked with the local hospital to create a design for the masks and shared the design with our sewing community. We were able to donate over 5,000 masks to professionals and community members before the store burned down. We also made and distributed scrub hats to the medical community.

I couldn't have done it without my family and friends. They have supported me in my late-night mask deliveries and long days at work. It also would have been impossible for me to buy this business without the support of Community Futures.

What has been the greatest reward to date as a small business in your industry?

I'd say it was watching the community mobilize to help during the pandemic. People showed up with donations and volunteered to sew masks. I have found that I am part of a community where businesses truly support each other, and the customers know the importance of supporting local shops. I felt that even more acutely when my business burned down, and I got an outpouring of support from the local community, people donated fixtures and their time. I can name where every fixture in the shop came from.

Why is it important for you to give back to the community through your business?

I've always been strongly bonded to my community; you have to be, in these remote towns. I was a scout leader for five years, and I have served on the local arts council for seven years. It is fun for me, but at times it can also be scary. At the end of the day, I'm doing something that I love, and hopefully supporting other people to do something they are proud of.

What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs in small communities of B.C.?

Do market research and work in the industry before you start your own business. Talk to people who are running similar businesses in other communities and ask what they found hard. Take some small business courses. I took two online courses designed by Small Business BC and they proved to be really helpful.

Make sure you are fully insured and keep good records of your inventory and fixtures. We never expect the disaster to happen, but you need to plan and set up systems so if that worst

scenario happens you are ready to get back on your feet.

The Bottom Line:

- Sarah has one part-time employee.
- In the next couple of years, Rain Forest Fabrics is going to focus on building their brand recognition, supporting their community and growing their business.