

The Soap Company chosen for Entrepreneurial Leaders Program

The Casket

Published: Jun 15 at 4:07 p.m.

Updated: Jun 18 at 3:39 p.m.



Leigh McFarlane, founder and CEO of The Soap Company, at her Municipality of the District of St. Mary's home. McFarlane and her company were chosen for the prestigious Entrepreneurial Leaders Program, from the Wallace McCain Institute, last month. - Richard MacKenzie

PORT HILLFORD, N.S. - If being an entrepreneur can, at times, seem like being on a deserted island, Leigh McFarlane has found a rescue ship.

McFarlane, founder and CEO of the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's-based business The Soap Company, was selected amongst a group of 28 Atlantic businesses for the 11th cohort of the Wallace McCain Institute's Entrepreneurial Leaders Program (ELP), late last month.

“With 405 nominations this year, the finalists faced stiff competition in the selection process,” a May 27 release from the program, stated.

“These business leaders in ELP11 will meet for two days each month, over the next year, in all four Atlantic Provinces, in an elite program with speakers and peer interaction. After the first year, alumni pledge to continue to meet quarterly, which is a testament to the value of the program in the lives of these CEOs.”

McFarlane said, during a “bad” day last year, she was browsing the internet and found a posting about ELP on YouTube.

“I knew I needed help but it’s so hard to figure out what, where,” she said, recalling the search which led her to ELP.

“I saw this [posting], watched the video and thought, yeah, that’s what I want to do. I recognized all the stages and so I just started the process, went through it and was fortunate enough to be chosen,” McFarlane said, adding she believes this is the first year the program was advertised and included an application process as well as its traditional nomination entry avenue.

“It talked about starting up and all the different stages you go through; you may have expanded a little bit and done different things. Then you reach a point where you have to make a decision; are you going to grow the company or do a lifestyle business?”

McFarlane said her goal with starting up The Soap Company was to, eventually, create jobs around her home in the Eastern Shore area.

“I don’t want a lifestyle that requires me to be working six or seven days a week for 10 or 12 hours a day; that’s not the lifestyle I’m looking for,” she said.

“I’m looking for something that will allow me to work a reasonable [schedule]. I want to work at what I do, I love that, but I want to spread the wealth out a bit and let other people help.”

She said her goal has always been to, “create at least 10 meaningful full-time jobs here,” and now, with the support of ELP, she feels more confident in reaching that objective.

“Not only are you getting together with your group for 12 months and the subsequent two years after that, you also have access to all the other people who have come before you and are part of it; it just keeps getting bigger and bigger,” McFarlane said.

“And, of course, their knowledge is increasing every year as they continue their businesses; the depth of it just blows me away. Statically, how much higher level businesses involved in ELP achieve, is significant.”

McFarlane noted that, of the 10 ELP cohorts which have come before, only one doesn't still meet on occasion.

"It's hard to keep groups together so, when I looked at the fact there are that many groups still getting together over so many years, I thought that's pretty amazing," she said.

"Out of all of the groups which have gone before us, only one, for whatever reason – I don't know, has collapsed. All of them still get together, so that is really powerful."

The diversity of businesses also impressed McFarlane who described the collection as "every business you could think of."

"Online, virtually, physical, service, product, consumer goods, IT, everything ... it's just remarkable," she said.

"I'm really grateful to be there. I wanted it so badly, I just didn't let myself think I wouldn't get in. I felt it was so important."

McFarlane said the selections are based on choosing businesses which will benefit most, from being part of a group.

"They're looking at the combinations of people and putting together groups they feel will help each other have the greatest amount of success over the next 20 to 30 years," she said. "In essence, it's like curated groups of people."

She noted "confidentiality" being another strong component of ELP.

"There is real power in that," she said. "The strength in knowing you're in a safe environment where you can talk about your business and hear about others' businesses, share ideas; that's rare ... it really, really is."

To learn more about ELP, visit wallacemccaininstitute.com/elp.

For more on McFarlane and The Soap Company, visit soapnovascotia.com or send her an email at leigh@soapnovascotia.com.