

Arts & LIFE

Fashion designer a Mompreneurs' Award of Excellence finalist

By Julie Slack
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

AnnaMaria Di Nicolantonio wants to dress every little girl in fancy clothes.

And she's got a chance of doing just that.

The Milton Mompreneur started with tutus, hand-sewn for her daughters, and now she's selling clothes to moms and their children around the world.

Olivia Rose — the children's clothing line she launched in 2010 — is the quintessential success story. So much so, that Di Nicolantonio is now a finalist in the 2017 Mompreneurs' Award of Excellence as Canada's official Mompreneur of the Year for businesses that have been operating at least three years. The grand-prize winner will be awarded cash and services valued at more than \$30,000.

The winners, selected by a panel of judges, will be announced at the 2017 National Mompreneurs Conference in Toronto on March 3-4.

After the birth of her second daughter, Julia Rose, Di Nicolantonio decided to fulfill her dream of designing her own line of girls' and women's fashions.

Olivia Rose's handmade collection of designer pettiskirts/petticoats and girls' apparel is available at retailers across the globe and featured at Indigo's 250 stores across Canada. The designer's Instagram followers number more than 25,000.

Olivia Rose specializes in creating a luxe line of baby, girls and ladies designer fashions including dresses, pettiskirts, T-shirts and tops, headbands, shoes, even ballerina dolls.

While stores around the world order direct from factories, online orders are personally filled right here in Milton, said Di Nicolantonio. A graduate of George Brown College's fashion program, the Milton mom is living the dream.

But for Di Nicolantonio, 35, Olivia Rose — the business named after her two daughters, Olivia, 10, and Julia Rose, seven — was never a



AnnaMaria Di Nicolantonio poses with her children — the inspiration behind her Olivia Rose line of clothing — 10-year-old Olivia (right) and Julia Rose, 7. **Supplied photo**

dream; she always knew she could do it.

Working in customer service for various banks for 12 years, Di Nicolantonio felt like it was time to do what she was intended to do. A graduate of the technical high school St. Augustine's in Brampton, she'd been studying fashion since Grade 9. She said teachers there prepared and honed her abilities in fashion and sewing.

Di Nicolantonio grew up dancing ballet and has never stopped. She performed in pointe shoes when she was five months pregnant. Last year, she was still involved in ballet, but admits it's difficult to find the time given her busy schedule.

It was instinctive that she'd encourage her daughters to follow suit. Needless to say, they too are young ballerinas.

She started sewing them tutus when they were just toddlers. The rest, as they say, is history.

Di Nicolantonio, who's been married to Mario for 11 years, says it's an honour to be nomi-

nated for the Mompreneur award.

Mompreneurs was founded by Milton's Maria Locker — born into business, since her mom and dad's family-owned and operated business is La Rose Bakery.

Now a Canada-wide movement, Mompreneurs has chapters across the country, with 17,000 members.

"I truly feel like this is my purpose in life," Di Nicolantonio said. "I love it so much."

Despite a disappointing first attempt at selling her handmade tutus at one of Olivia's ballet recitals — she didn't sell any — Di Nicolantonio never let it get her down.

In fact, she credits Locker's Milton Mommies Mompreneur event at the Milton Sports Centre as her real start because that's where her handmade tutus became a hit in 2010.

"I remember lugging in big black garbage bags of my handmade tutus," she laughed, adding she felt like a novice at that first show. "All I had were tutus and a few mannequins."

She's come a long way since then. Now, from her second-storey office, luxuriously decorated in clean whites, she goes over the latest spring collection of baby-wear with a keen eye for what will sell and what needs to be changed.

Sticking with feminine colours and floral patterns intended to be whimsical, she said she wants to ensure the clothing is both pretty and practical. It has to fit the comfort test, but also must delight moms with the pretty-factor.

She says one piece of advice she can offer to those considering going into business is "walk in business, don't run."

Her collections can be described as timeless classic, and are suited to everyday fashion, dress-up, parties, dance recitals, portrait sessions, weddings and other special occasions. Despite having dozens of fancy dresses to choose from, Di Nicolantonio has no trouble narrowing down her personal favourite: the Victorian princess dream pettadress. Turns out it's the No. 1 seller around the world as well.

"I love to be able to dress little girls worldwide and be a part of so many special moments in their lives," she said from her office at 225 Main St., located right around the corner from the Olivia Rose storefront location she opened a year ago at 6 Martin St.

The Olivia Rose label is sought after. Case in point, Di Nicolantonio's creations appeared in the "swag rooms" at the Golden Globes and the Oscars, with some Olivia Rose apparel worn by the children of celebrities such as Tori Spelling's daughter.

Di Nicolantonio is now looking forward to expanding her women's collection of designer favourites.

A self-described "girly-girl", Di Nicolantonio said she's always loved fashion and is thrilled to be able to share that passion with like-minded women.

For more information, visit www.oliviarose.com or the Mompreneurs' website at www.themompreneur.com.

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