

ARTS

Griffiths Max-ing Out on W Network

Milton woman takes over reigns of money management show

By Stephanie Thiessen
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Milton money expert Alison Griffiths sees people playing Russian roulette with their finances every day.

There's the shopper who just has to have the latest "it" item, even if she can't afford it, leading to a mountain of debt almost as high as her stash of shoes. There's the couple so busy trying to keep up with life that they don't notice their monthly take-out bill exceeds their mortgage payment.

And there's the woman who dreams of making her business work, but who has gone into debt in the process.

These aren't hypothetical scenarios. Griffiths has encountered each of them in her role as the new host of the W Network's TV show Maxed Out, which recently entered its second season.

"We take women and couples and give them a financial makeover," Griffiths said, adding, "People have a myriad of ways to get into debt and a myriad of excuses."

Through the show, Griffiths is working to shed some light on one of society's last taboos — talking about money.

"We're way more likely to talk about what we do in bed than about money," Griffiths said.

Many, if not most, Canadians live on the edge financially, managing to stay afloat with credit, Griffiths explained.

Maxed Out is a tell-it-like-it-is show that provides honest and practical advice to help viewers overcome extreme financial stress and overwhelming debts.

In each of the 30-minute episodes, Griffiths delves into the financial crisis of a different participant, leaving no stone unturned in her search for the cause of their debt disaster.

Thorough analysis of bank and credit card statements, loan and spending patterns lead her to shocking conclusions about the participants' debt and the crippling impact it's having on their futures. "People's money habits are often a reflection of something deeper," Griffiths said.

Some situations are easier than others to solve. One couple on the show makes \$180,000 per year in combined income but still can't make ends meet. Their solution was to be more organized and pay attention to what they were spending money on.

Other participants must embark on a journey that may take five or six years until they reach their goal of being debt-free, Griffiths said.

Griffiths is more than qualified to host the show, being an award-winning financial journalist, best-selling author and seasoned broadcaster. She co-writes a regular column with her husband, David Cruise, called The Portfolio Doctor for the Toronto Star. The pair also holds seminars about investing and money management.

Debt, Griffiths said, has become a national epidemic — and it's one to which she's not a stranger. In 1991, her daughter caught meningitis. Caring for her over the year caused Griffiths and her husband, who earned their living writing books, to be unable to write a book as planned.

That was the equivalent of losing a year's income. Five years later, around 1997 when they moved to Milton, they were still struggling to catch up, Griffiths said. That's when they began writing about what they knew — money problems.

It's not easy getting out of debt, but Griffiths is a testament to the fact it can be done. And going through the experience has helped her empathize with the people she helps.

"They need some sympathy, but they also need the hard facts — what I needed 15 years ago," she said.

The advice she gives isn't always appreciated initially, Griffiths said, admitting it's tough to withstand the temptation to spend. But the feeling participants get when they find themselves financially free is empowering. "It's like an adrenaline rush," she said.

Griffiths hopes that viewers will realize it's never too late to turn around a bad financial situation. But even more than that, Griffiths hopes the show will help viewers avoid getting into debt in the first place.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



NEW HOST:
Alison Griffiths offers financial aid on the W Network's Maxed Out.

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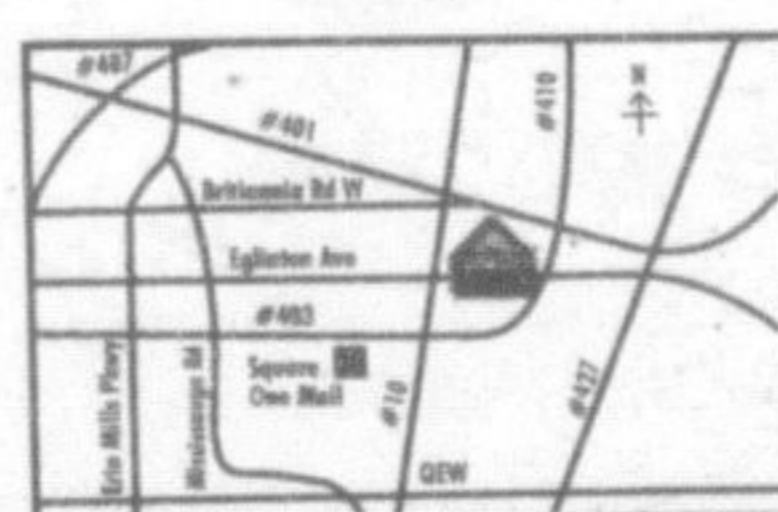
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