

Sequoia gets under your skin

Beats working outside!

By: Dan Rosenburg

Michaelee (pronounced Mick Haley, not Michael Lee) Lazore studied to be an engineer. She attended Queen's University in Kingston and then graduated from Concordia with a Bachelor in Mechanical Engineering.

Degree in hand, she went to work for Joe Deom Associates in Kahnawake, toiling there for five years until her departure last December.

"Surveying for six straight weeks in minus 30-degree weather was not exciting and fun." Lazore disclosed. "I was already giving beauty-product parties in people's homes, doing demos at night, so something had to give. I had more fun doing that than working 9-to-5 outdoors in freezing temperatures."

"She painstakingly concocts her own beauty products in a workshop in her basement, experimenting with various natural oils and essences. "Everything is handmade," she explains, proudly. After a few months of house calls, Michaelee decided it was high time she opened her own business.

It just so happened that Tewatohnni'saktha had space available in its new business complex adjacent to the KSCS building. So Michaelee moved into one of the spanking new boutiques. She had her grand opening last Friday.

Did she have any opening specials to mark the occasion?

"Specials?" she asked. "Heck, we were just happy to be open!"

She decided to call her shop 'Sequoia' after the trees of the same name that live up to 3,000 years old in Western Canada and the U.S. "They are one of the only things I know of that live that long," Michaelee says. "Their circumference is huge," she marvels. "I wanted to pick a name related to nature and, like the Natives, these trees were here before Columbus. So my choice was Native-inspired."

She confides that Sequoia is also the name of the half-Cherokee, half-French man who invented the Cherokee alphabet.

Although Michaelee is the sole owner of the boutique, she has help from her nine-year-old daughter, Leilani Shaw, a Kateri School student, and Sequoia's one and only full-time employee, Raven August.

"Leilani puts the tops on the bath bombs and the soy candles for decoration purposes," says Raven. "She also helped stock the shelves and did the signs!"

A part-time production assistant, Sheena McGregor, provides sugar scrubs, moisturizers and exfoliators. (Exfoliators, in case you didn't know, are products that remove dead skin. But you really didn't need to know this!)

Michaelee enjoys getting creative and finding new scents and designs for her soaps, all of which contain natural ingredients. The most popular of these are oatmeal bars, red clover, sunset and "Brother the Sun". All of them contain 5 percent red palm oil.

Some soaps are made with milk, which she readily admits is difficult to do. "You have to make



Michaelee Lazore displays some of her beauty products at newly-opened Sequoia boutique.

sure it doesn't get hot and burns the milk," she says.

While cheap lotions found in most department stores contain mineral oil, Michaelee prefers olive oil, grape-seed oil or sweet almond oil, which are more expensive but more natural. Her soothing soaps and bath bombs feature shea butter oil, which is easier on the skin.

"Most commercial soaps are made with animal fat," Michaelee explains. "Vegetarians usually shy away from them. But mine are made with vegetable oils, palm kernel, sunflower seed oil, cocoa butter, castor oil and coconut oil." Until she arrived at the right combinations, "I did a whole lot of experimenting," Michaelee admits. "You wouldn't believe how much a lot of elements affect soap, essences or fragrances."

Michaelee bristles when one suggests that perhaps her boutique caters to women only. "(Male) construction workers were our first customers on opening day," she corrected. "They purchased oatmeal soap and they like some of our masculine fragrances such as harvest spice, sweet grass and mint."

Many of her soaps are adorned with her own artwork/handiwork.

Some of her special attractions are called Grandmother Moon (in which vanilla extract turns the soap an earthy shade of brown), Mother Earth and snowy mountain mint (replete with wispy clouds). "Yes, there is a certain amount of artistry involved," Michaelee acknowledges.

Bath bombs are a whole different ball of wax, er oils. "At one stage I almost gave up on them," she confessed. "A few of them totally expended because they were holding too much moisture. Then they became flat as pancakes," she laughed. "I handed some of them out at my daughter's birthday party. The kids like them because they thought they looked like cookies!" But that hardly ever happens anymore!

"Once I had the idea to add liquid soap to create bubbling bath bombs," Michaelee continued, "but the pot of ingredients grew so I put it in the shower. Pretty soon the entire shower was filled with bubbles," she giggled.

Sequoia also has ready-made gift baskets which are ideal for presents. The store is open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays but closes at 5 p.m. Saturdays. Sunday is a day of rest.