

2020 Rhode Island Small Business Persons of the Year

the Bodhi Spa

Owners: Harmony Oschefski and Cedar Hwang

Harmony Oschefski and Cedar Hwang have always been called to the water. Rhode Island-born, Nova Scotian-raised, the sisters' formative years were steeped in a culture of clean, sustainable living that exposed them to the powerful therapeutic nature of water on the body.

As they grew, they began forging their own paths. Harmony, fascinated by the human body, earned her degree in Human Kinetics, and began working in nutraceuticals (functional nutrition). Cedar's love of the water steered her towards a sailing career that enabled her to travel the world, eventually leading her to the captaincy of the Heritage, a classic America's Cup yacht.

In 2013 they began planning The Bodhi Spa - a hydrotherapy day spa, focusing on whole-body wellness. The spa offers massage, esthetics, body treatment and, most importantly, the restorative experience of the ancient Roman-style thermal bath circuit. Harmony and Cedar secured an SBA 504 loan from Ocean State Business Development Authority to purchase and renovate their Newport location. In June 2015, with the renovations complete, The Bodhi Spa officially opened its doors.

"The SBA was imperative to the opening of the bodhi spa. While Cedar and I are both American citizens, I had only recently moved back to Rhode Island after living in Canada for 30 years. The leave left me with no real credit or borrowing leverage. The SBA saw my unique case and gave options to overcome these setbacks. What this reaffirmed and I will always carry with me, is that there is a solution to every problem. With the right conversations we can usually overcome any obstacle and in the end, there is growth," said Oschefski.

After just 18 months in operation, The Bodhi Spa had grown from 7 to 21 employees and had served almost 10,000 unique customers. With success coming so quickly, Harmony and Cedar found themselves rushing to keep up. To ensure they were properly prepared, Harmony enrolled in the SBA's 2018 Emerging Leaders class, where she was exposed to executive-level training that proved invaluable to the business' continued growth. Within a year of graduating, Harmony and Cedar began an expansion and, by 2019, secured 2 more SBA-backed loans to open a second location in Providence.

Josh Daly of the RI Small Business Development Center at URI, who nominated the sisters for the award, clearly saw the sisters' potential from the start. "Harmony, Cedar, their partners and team at Bodhi have built an exceptional business" said Daly. "Their commitment to a beautiful and peaceful experience for all who enter their spa is clear, but what I have been most impressed with is their equal commitment to patiently do the hard work involved in growing

and expanding their business, whatever challenges may arise. I am proud of them for this well-deserved award” he added.

As of 2020, with 31 employees, almost \$2 million in yearly sales, and a pending second location, The Bodhi Spa is an undeniably huge success. As COVID-19 took hold, the sisters found themselves in dire straits. The spa faced regulations that forced clients to stay away. With no revenue coming in, Harmony and Cedar were faced with laying off their employees, but instead were able to secure a PPP loan from Berkshire Bank and an EIDL loan from the SBA. These loans allowed the sisters to keep their staff employed until state restrictions allowed them to reopen.

“Without the PPP and EIDL loans we would have been in serious trouble and both locations would have suffered tremendously and may not have survived” said Harmony. “All of the help from the SBA has absolutely saved our business during this time and we are so grateful to have such support” she added.

“We have overcome a lot in the past 7 years. Building a business that has never been done before in this state is a blessing and a curse. We relish in the creative process of being the first, however being the first also means creating the plan and making the mistakes along the way,” said Oschefski. “We have grown tremendously, and we are grateful that the process is only just beginning. We will continue to provide a place of wellness as we expand the brand and share the health! We are already talking about number 3!”

Through all the obstacles, frustrations, and adversity, Harmony and Cedar have persevered, and the Bodhi Spa is a shining example of how hard work, knowledge and perseverance can get a small business through even the toughest of times.