



Debbie Cornelius' (right) business, Wee Piggies and Paws, which is a home based business specializing in one-of-a-kind childhood preservations, has allowed her to spend more time at home with her children, from left, Katherine, 7, and Laura, 5.

Debbie Cornelius, Wee Piggies & Paws

Four years ago, when Debbie Cornelius' children were still young, she wanted to do something special to preserve the memories of their childhood.

Investing in some plaster and mold-making skills, the young mother captured her young daughter Laura's tiny hands and footprints via plaster "life casts." When the concept proved popular with her friends and family, Cornelius decided to utilize her sales and marketing background by starting her own business creating one-of-a-kind impressions in statue form.

The only problem was finding a balance between work and family.

"Moms always want to stay at home and my kids are with me all day," she says. "We want to take care of our children but also need to make a living."

After spending one year researching and formulating a business concept, Cornelius started "Wee Piggies & Paws," and quickly turned it into a full-fledged franchise machine. As soon as word spread about her new initiative, the entrepreneur received interest from mothers from all over that wanted to work from home. In its four years of operation, Wee Piggies and Paws has grown to 48 franchise locations across Canada, the U.S. and U.K.

"It's a huge network and women like networking," says Cornelius, who teaches workshops and provides supplies and materials to franchisees out of her St. Catharines home. "No one has franchises on something unique like this. We have more franchises than Toys R Us!"

With the success of her business, it was only natural for Cornelius to be acknowledged with a nomination for the Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards in the categories of Innovative Small Business and Emerging Entrepreneur.

"It's really nice (to be nominated) and to be among them (other entrepreneurs) is an honour on so many levels," she said.

— **Eddie Chau**