



Off the beaten path

Try Stick Men University, clownology, degrees in gossip ...

MONIKA MORAVAN
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Canadians are very adaptable people, a trait inspired perhaps by how frequently our weather changes.

With job protection and fully indexed pension plans turning into some kind of urban legend, Canada's workforce is embracing career training offered outside of mainstream colleges and universities.

Eva Szypulska, vice-president of marketing and senior project manager for Toronto-based The Heron Group of Companies, which includes Heathwood Homes, didn't just think outside the box for the next phase of her career, she packed it at "Stick Men University."

Founded by the Two Men and a Truck chain, all potential franchises must attend a two-week training session at the company's Lansing, Mich., headquarters before setting up shop and continue with online training as mandated.

"There was a natural connection between the two," says Szypulska of her decision to open the company's first corporate store in Canada.

Her marketing background came in handy while learning the ins and outs of franchise op-

eration but sometimes a little knowledge can indeed be a dangerous thing, learning a bit of this and a dash of that throughout her career.

"I almost think it would have been easier if I'd gone in not knowing anything," Szypulska says with a laugh during a lunch break at Stick Men U.

Under a cloud of grey economic skies, employees seek out colour in other aspects of their lives, with dreams of running away to join the circus taking flight. That's

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where Vancouver's Fantastic Space Enterprises (www.fantasticspace.com) fulfills the fantasy.

"It's not clown in the colloquial sense of red nose and big shoes, but can certainly serve that purpose," says founder and instructor David Smith of his "creative character development and personal development

through clown" program.

Nicknamed "clownology," the intensive 12-week course attracts a wide cast of characters ranging from arts students to business owners to retired professors. About 50% are already working in the arts.

"When it comes to taking it to a more professional level, the demands do increase," Smith says of the additional training offered in both group and one-on-one sessions.

Those with career aspirations that are more into the woods than under the big top might want to entertain options in a growing field.

"There's definitely a need for more taxidermists in Ontario," says Robert Goudreault. "The older guys are going to retire and it's definitely a trade that needs more people."

Goudreault, a winner of 58 Canadian championship awards, operates Woods and Water in Campbellford, Ont. Those looking for formal training in the art might have to temporarily relocate. Penn School of Taxidermy in Calgary, Alta., offers courses spanning from one weekend to six weeks.

"There is no real school for it in Ontario, although you might catch the odd college course to teach you the basics," Goudreault says.

Those whose hunting tastes are geared more to tracking information than animals can follow in the footsteps of Shawne Duperon. The six-time Emmy award-winning communicator is a gossip expert.

Yes, gossip. And she will soon have a PhD from Wayne State University in Detroit, Mich., to prove it.

On a speaking engagement in Toronto, Duperon explained a gossip degree was a logical extension of her BA in Telecommunications and MA in Mass Media.

"Gossip is mass media on steroids," Duperon says. "Going by the academic definition — talking about somebody who is not present — 90% of what comes out of our mouths is gossip."

What comes out of the hand can also be a lucrative living. Dean Correia, a licensed private investigator and owner of Correia Security in Mississauga, Ont., frequently uses the handwriting analysis skills learned at LSI (Laboratory for Scientific Interrogation, Inc.) in Arizona. Training was just the first part.

"Experience is the best teacher," says Correia.