

NEIGHBOURS OF

JUNE 2020

Bracebridge

*Moving Ahead
In Bracebridge
- Meet Brittainy
McGillis!*



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Bracebridge is great, but it's even better with a successful career and nearby family and friends to share it with.

A close history with the town doesn't hurt either, as this month's Feature Resident Brittainy McGillis can attest.

A licensed paralegal, Brittainy owns McGillis Legal which first opened its doors in the Clock Tower building on Manitoba Street in June 2018.

With years of hands-on experience in the hospitality trade, which taught her the value of exceptional service and working with others, it's no wonder Brittainy is expanding the business now so quickly.

As many locals will recall, her parents Don and Brenda owned the Riverside Inn in Bracebridge for 21 years.

The family sold the Inn in 2013, but Brittainy looks back fondly on her years there when she helped run it, working many tasks from operating the pool/fitness centre to working the front desk.

"I grew up like the Suite Life of Zack and Cody, living in a hotel," she laughs. "It was definitely different. We moved here from a little further north when I was about six. It was a lot of fun. I definitely learned that it takes a village. We had some employees that opened the hotel with us when I was six who were still there

when we retired in 2013."

Brittainy also has an older brother named Don who is currently a Rooms Manager at the Sheraton hotel in Richmond Hill and a younger brother Jonathan who still lives here in town working as a Main Server at Wabora.

While living primarily in the Riverside all those years, the family also had a home across the Muskoka River from the business which they used as a cottage.

"It was a kind of a place to take a break for my parents because as they were getting older and at that time and we were capable of running the hotel," says Brittainy. "We were literally working 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You don't sleep (in the hotel business) and you are on call all the time. It certainly gave me the knowledge of hard work.

Brittainy turned 32 in May and she is proud of what she's accomplished in her young life.

Her own business recently relocated to Huntsville where she now shares office space at 10 Howland Drive Unit 4 with Crown Attorney Robin Bellows. Brittainy is really looking forward to this next chapter as she will learn more about law and be bridging out to experience more scopes of practice.

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Photo provided via Brittainy McGillis



Photo via Brittainy McGillis

Paralegals in Ontario, like lawyers, are licensed under the Law Society of Ontario (LSO). They cover a wide array of practices which includes, working without a lawyer's oversight, small claims court cases, provincial offences and their appeals and MTO, MNR, Traffic and building code legal matters.

They can also represent clients at human rights tribunals, the licensing board landlord & tenant board and employment law tribunals.

Brittainy's path to where she is now began in the formal education she enjoyed growing up in Bracebridge.

She attended Monsignor Michael O'Leary before graduating to St. Dominic's Catholic High School and kept active in those years with a wide variety of activities.

"Sports were always fun because it was an extra hour you didn't have to be working at the hotel," she remembers. "I played basketball, volleyball - pretty much any type of sport you could think of. In high school, I was on every single sporting team. We went to a small school, so everybody knew each other. You could be the drama geek and the sports jock all at the same time and nobody judged you, so you had a really well-balanced and well-rounded experience in education."

Brittainy was set to go to law school following St. Doms and attended Nipissing University next, graduating in North Bay in 2011 with her BA Honours in history and sociology. She attended some of those classes here at the Bracebridge Nipissing campus.

Following this period, she took some time off when her mom became ill, diagnosed with lung cancer, which she eventually beat.

"Because of this I decided I needed to stay in the hotel and be there for her," says Brittainy. "But I was also thinking 'what else can I do that isn't law school, but that can help me do something in the legal profession.'"

That's when she decided to attend CTS Canadian Career College in Barrie to get her paralegal diploma - a two-year program which she finished in just over 11 months, followed by graduation in 2013.

Part of her inspiration for following the legal path began in Grade 11 when she took her first law course and loved it.

"The teacher, Mr. Forrester, was awesome and it was a really interesting course," she remembers.

Her aunt Donna McGillis was also a Supreme Court Justice from May 13, 1992 to May 15, 2003, so the legal bug ran strong in the family.

It's not all serious work for Brittainy though. Like other Muskoka residents, she enjoys some downtime out on occasion.

"When you are running your own business you don't have a ton of spare time," she says, "but in the summer I try to take full advantage of living here. My friends always joke about me being in my 'Muskoka office', which means I'm usually floating in the river enjoying the sun with some friends. I love being able to have BBQ's and bonfires as well. I really enjoy having a quiet night with friends.

When not out with friends or working, Brittainy enjoys spending time with her 4-year-old rescued Mainecoon named Waffles. "Many of the young children on my street come over to play with her, with their parent's permission, and Waffles eagerly waits every evening watching them to come down the driveway."

Several friends of hers have also returned home to establish their own businesses, including real estate, architecture firms and contracting companies, amongst others.

“That’s been really cool to see them come back and become highly respected professionals in the community,” she says. “It’s also been fun to work with them from a legal aspect to help them get their businesses up and running.”

She’s also very thankful that many of her friends lean on her for business support. Her history in the hotel biz showed her how to run a successful business and keep employees happy, knowledge she’s more than happy to pass on.

For now, her own job footprint keeps her busy, taking her from Bracebridge to Parry Sound, Sundridge and on to North Bay. She specializes in provincial offences and traffic cases, which includes everything from speeding tickets to careless causing death.

She’s also busy providing service to clients with her knowledge on MNR regulations. She also defends many companies with regards to MTO and CVOR violations.

Brittainy says she always wanted to make sure that someone who grew up in a small community would be there to fight for other local small businesses too.

Not one for resting on her laurels, Brittainy keeps busy on professional development during her time off too.

Throughout the pandemic for instance, she has been upgrading in courses that have been made free from universities and Ivy League colleges in the US, which teach different litigation techniques and tactics that will help keep her ahead of the curve.

She is very thankful for her mentorship from Michelle Scott, owner of Scott Paralegal in Huntsville. McGillis Legal grew out from that business, in fact.

“As Michelle Scott was transitioning over to becoming a Prosecutor in Parry Sound, she asked if I wanted to train underneath her to take over her clients,” says Brittainy. “I was very lucky and blessed that I had that opportunity to learn from someone who had been doing this for 15 years.”

In short, Brittainy finds the opportunities Bracebridge and other Muskoka locations provide to be one-of-a-kind and “absolutely beautiful.”

Whether it’s local experiences out in nature or unique times out at restaurants and businesses, it’s the personal touches that remain important here, which she tries to carry into her own business model.

“There are so many little nooks and crannies of awesome shopping, food vendors and restaurants,” she says. “Nine times out of ten you are talking to the owner of the business you are at and this will guarantee you get the best service you can possibly have. It’s because it’s their business and their lives. They love it and want you to love Muskoka too.”

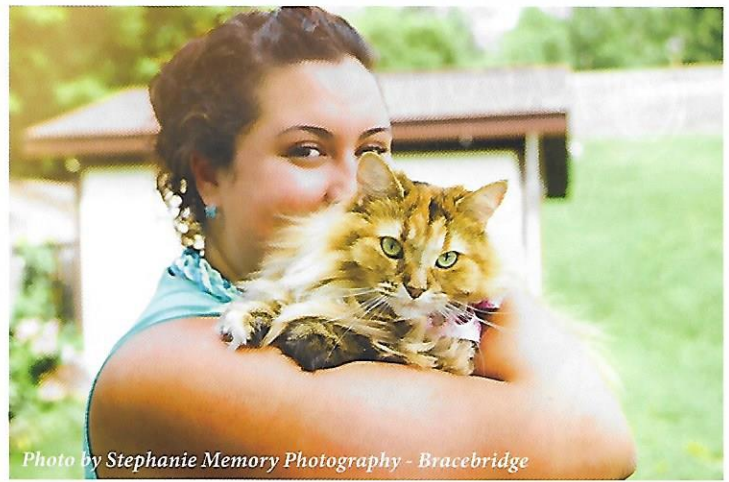
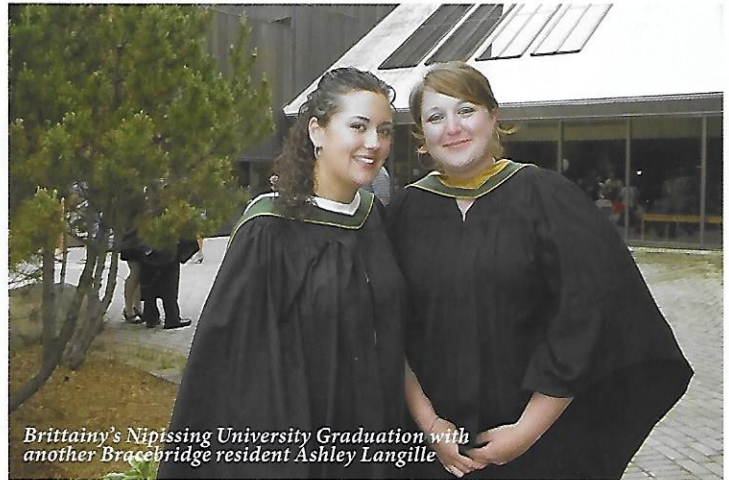


Photo by Stephanie Memory Photography - Bracebridge



Brittainy's Nipissing University Graduation with another Bracebridge resident Ashley Langille



Photo provided via Brittainy McGillis

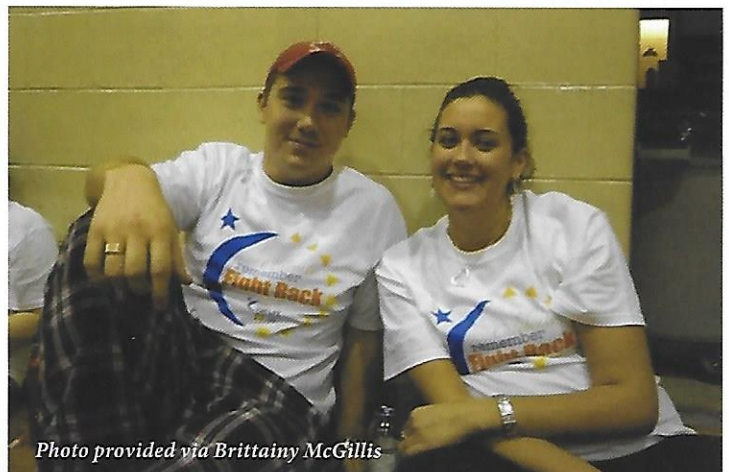


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