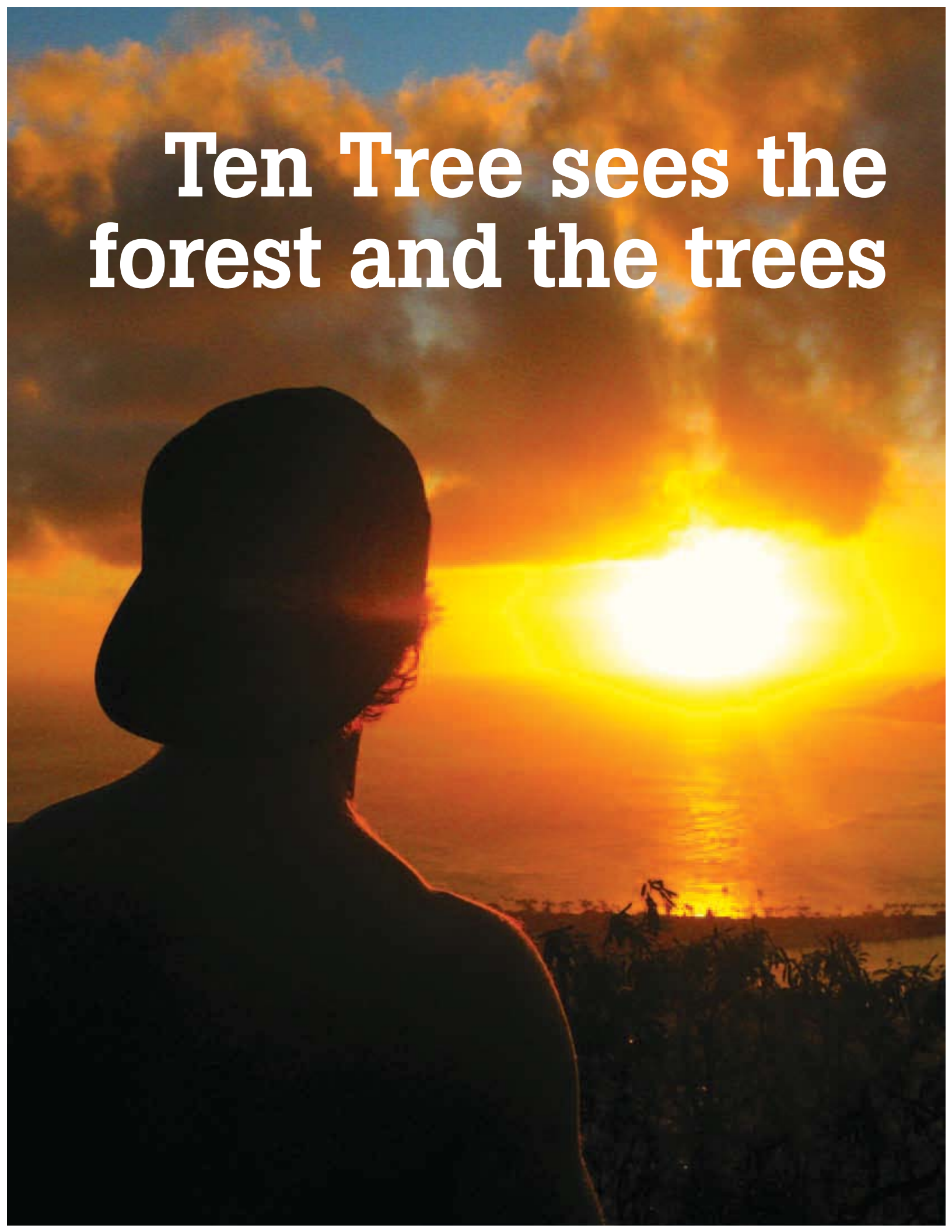



**Ten Tree sees the
forest and the trees**





Two University of Regina students who have embraced the people, planet, profit business model are enjoying tree-mendous growth less than a year after establishing their clothing enterprise. Now, with the additional support of two dragons from the popular CBC television program *Dragon's Den*, the pair is poised for even loftier growth. Along with their success they're doing their part to protect the environment – 10 trees at a time.

By Raquel Fletcher BA'12

Photos by Don Hall, University of Regina Photography Department and courtesy of David Luba and Kalen Emsley.

David Luba is a social butterfly. Even on crutches, he flutters from one table to the next, personally thanking people for coming out to The Owl, the University of Regina campus pub. Despite a knee operation only five days ago, Luba, a fourth year U of R business student, shows no signs of slowing down – good thing, because neither does the company he recently launched: Ten Tree Apparel.

"I feel like it's gotten so big, it almost doesn't seem possible," he says.

In the past 10 months, Luba and his business partner Kalen Emsley DIPBA'09, have jet-setted the continent, promoting one of Regina's hottest new businesses – a new clothing line with an environmentalist penchant sold in 60 stores across Canada.

If tonight's crowd is any indication, Ten Tree has become as big as Luba suggests – and in a very short time. This evening, hundreds of people sporting Ten Tree clothing have flooded The Owl to watch the Ten Tree partners make their pitch to the *Dragon's Den* to see what kind of investment they might attract for this unique and proud Saskatchewan company. Sworn to secrecy, only the partners know the outcome of the pitch. Soon, the rest of the room will know.

The idea is simple – the company plants 10 trees for every t-shirt, hoodie or tank top they sell – and the impact could be enormous. "Everyone's been so great supporting this cause, and now we're building a forest," Luba says.

A cross between the business models of TOMS Shoes and lululemon, Ten Tree has quickly become popular among socially and environmentally conscious consumers, as well as the brand conscious.

"It's just so cool because we don't have many companies here like this that start up and are successful," says Haley Bolen, a U of R English student attending the *Dragon's Den* broadcast event. She says the company being centred around protecting the planet makes her a fan.

For the past several months, Luba and Emsley have also been working on a video series called *Inspire*, being shown for the first time this evening at the Owl. The series, produced in partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Federation, is intended to do just that – inspire entrepreneurship and environmental stewardship of the planet. The videos are particularly aimed at young people to take an interest in nature.

"We're not trying to tell people to turn off their computers, we're using the computer, media and YouTube as tools," says Emsley.

"We don't want to tell you that you can't be on your computer – be on your computer, but there's this whole world out there you can discover and that's what these videos are meant to do," says Luba.

For Kaylyn Kyle, Olympic soccer player from Saskatoon, Ten Tree is a business she was eager to throw her support behind. "Yeah, they're a company and they're trying to make money, but they're also changing the environment and Canada – and I love that," she shouts excitedly over the blaring pub music.

She travelled to Regina specifically for the event and shares Bolen's feeling that it's exciting to see two local entrepreneurs get so far. "Saskatchewan is so small and you really want to see everyone do well," she says.

Many of the guests in the bar are also friends of the two young business owners. A hush falls over the room as Luba, Emsley and his brother and business associate Derrick Emsley finally enter the *Dragon's Den* to make their pitch on national television.

"I think (...) it's a shame if business schools aren't teaching 'people,

U of R student David Luba watches a sunset in Hawaii, where the Ten Tree idea was born. The image now appears on every piece of Ten Tree apparel sold.

planet, profit' and are just teaching 'profit' because that's not the future of business," says Dragon Arlene Dickinson on the telecast. "The future of business is to be socially responsible, environmentally friendly and make money. It's all of those things."

There's a round of applause, hoots, hollers and whistles when Dickinson and fellow dragon Bruce Croxon jointly offer Ten Tree a \$100,000 investment, proof that Ten Tree has inspired more than just environmentalists.

Emsley and Luba's downtown office is about the furthest thing imaginable to the type of workspace one would think their company would spur. Admittedly, they don't spend a lot of time in it. "We're on the road lots," says Luba.

It's another example of how the two business partners work to create balance – between work and play, indoor and outdoor, new technology and nature, and business and philanthropy.

"You want to feel good about what you're doing," Emsley explains, before launching into sincere concerns about the polar ice caps melting. It's the type of discouraging global situation that keeps him motivated to do what he does. He doesn't draw the line between a profit-oriented business and one that gives back to the world. He says, "If there were other businesses doing this, we would be nothing special, but we really believe in it, so it makes it easy."

As well as inspiring consumers to think twice about the

planet, they also want to inspire other young business-minded students to do the same. "I feel like we are [role models], just showing young entrepreneurs what they're capable of doing," says Luba.

Although it's about doing something for the world, Ten Tree is a business – not a charity, but they hope more companies will follow their lead in helping to protect the planet.

"As our company motto goes," says Emsley, "protect the world you play in. That's what we're about."

It's a strange sight to see a tree farm on the Saskatchewan prairie – but a square mile lot near the R.M. of Edenwold, about 30 minutes outside of Regina, is where Ten Tree began.

While walking through the hundreds of rows of hybrid poplars, Emsley and Luba are glued to their smartphones.

"More and more people now are using social media,

so we've really tried to use that to our advantage as young entrepreneurs," Luba explains.

Their success hasn't dampened their enthusiasm to get their hands dirty. On National Tree Day, they hosted 50 Grade 6 students from McClurg Elementary School in Regina and together planted 10 trees by hand. "They were super excited," says Emsley. "I didn't think they would be, but they wanted to plant even more."

Part of Ten Tree's corporate consciousness is a desire to reach out to the global community and connect it to the

"More and more people now are using social media, so we've really tried to use that to our advantage as young entrepreneurs."



(left to right): Kalen Emsley, David Luba and Derrick Emsley on the set of CBC TV's Dragon's Den the day of their successful pitch.



Above left: (right to left) Emsley, Luba and a friend hiking Diamond Head in Honolulu, Hawaii. Above right: Emsley and Luba in their Ten Tree Regina stock room.



environment. The company has partnered with We Forest, an international NGO committed to reforestation in developing countries. The NGO plants 50 per cent of the company's trees. In the future, Ten Trees intends to be able to offer customers the opportunity to select the countries where they want their trees planted. The other 50 per cent of trees are planted at the forestation project in Edenwold and across Canada with the help of the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

As is evident on their website, the Ten Tree founders are committed to working with environmentally reputable organizations. Their clothing supplier, Oregon Stream Impressions in Portland, Ore., runs their factory partly on solar energy and lends bikes to its employees to cut down on pollution of commuting with cars.

Although self-professed idealists, both Emsley and Luba have past experience as entrepreneurs and tree planters. While in high school, Kalen and Derrick owned a carbon offsetting company, the site of which is now the Edenwold tree farm.

That doesn't mean, of course, they're old pros.

"Yeah, every time we make an error, we send out Ten Tree cookies to say, 'oh, sorry,'" Luba laughs, explaining it's also a good way to support one of the local downtown shops, apparently now proficient in customized Ten Tree baking.

Despite the need to apologize from time to time with tasty treats, Luba and Emsley might just be the face of "the new world of business" like Dickinson suggests.

"A lot of people ask, is this for real? Is this just a trend?" Kalen says. "We started out with the idea that we wanted to help the environment. That's first and foremost. We'd rather have a good reputation and go under than try to cut costs."

That attitude may stem from the fact the idea came, first and foremost, from a love of nature. It was on the beautiful island of Hawaii, where Ten Tree began to grow.

"We're looking around thinking, 'this place is gorgeous,'" says Luba as he recounts the trip Emsley made to visit him while he was studying accounting and economics for one year at the University of Manoa in Honolulu. The pair did a lot of

outdoor activities, including biking and surfing, he adds.

With the help of social media and the support of Saskatchewan people, Ten Tree has become a success story; in June, they won the Saskatchewan Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs Volta award and were showcased as one of the next hot up and coming designers at Saskatchewan Fashion Week. Now with the help of Dragon's Den, they are

on their way to becoming a nationally recognized brand. As Luba laughingly puts it, Ten Tree is "branching out" – with so many sales, they have planted more than 105,000 trees to date.

They credit their success to their roots and, in part, to their education at the University of Regina. "I learned tons at the U of R," says Luba. "I took some really cool classes on marketing, accounting and finance. But the opportunity to go on a student exchange to Hawaii really made this business happen. That's what got me to Hawaii, that's what got Kalen out to Hawaii, and that's where the idea got started."

Emsley, who received a Hill Ivy scholarship to Western University after spending his first two years at the U of R, echoes the thought but adds there's a reason they both came home to Saskatchewan. "There would have been no way to start this company in any other province. The support here is unreal. You go to Toronto and want to start a clothing company, no one is going to help you," says Emsley.

"And the support from the U of R has been phe-nom-e-nal," Luba stresses.

"Saskatchewan is just a great place to live," says Emsley. "It's done a lot for us; we're going to do a lot for it. We just hope a lot of cool new businesses open and stay operating in Saskatchewan."

They may be a growing business, but they plan to stay local. "We love it here. Plus we have the Roughriders, so why would we leave?" says Luba with a smirk. ■

Raquel Fletcher is a freelance journalist based in Regina, Saskatchewan. Her forte is environmental and business issues.