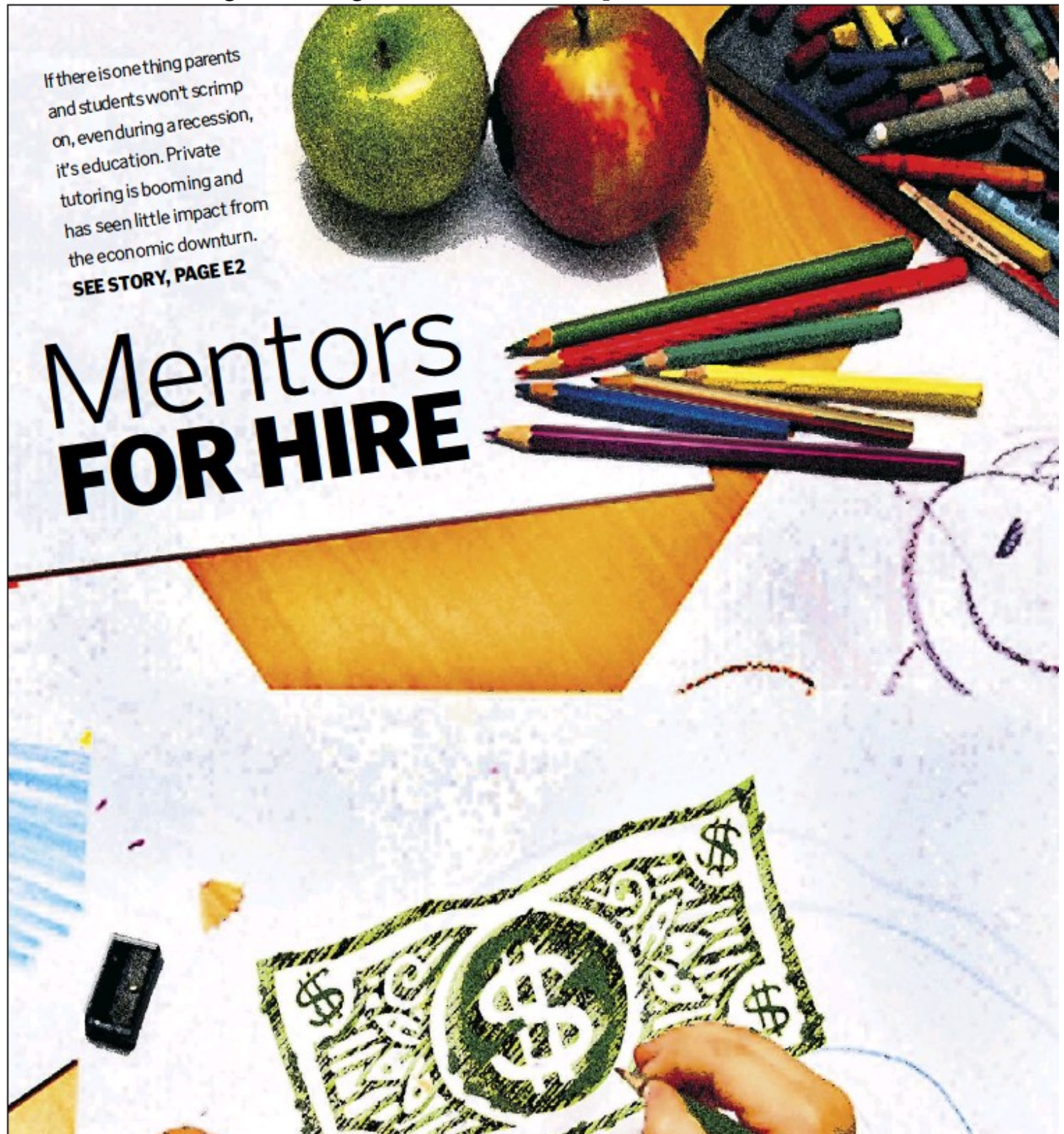


Mentors for hire

Booming business defies slumping economy

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If there is one thing parents and students won't scrimp on, even during a recession, it's education. Private tutoring is booming and has seen little impact from the economic downturn.





There was only one obstacle in the way of Kathleen McLeod reaching her career goal: math. After struggling with the subject in high school, she realized that to get into her program of choice — international business and supply chain management at Mount Royal University — she had to upgrade her highschool-level Pure Math 30.

“It’s just not something that comes easy to me,” says McLeod. So she hired a private tutor — a math instructor at the institution — in her first year of studies in 2005.

She instantly “clicked” with the tutor, Louise Ridout, founder of Calgarybased Education Wise. A few short months later, she not only passed the course, but also got a mark over 80 per cent. “My parents were shocked,” she says. “I couldn’t believe it.”

Now in her final year of the program, she got a full-time job of her dreams when an oil and gas company hired her as a buyer a year ago. She’s finishing her program by taking night courses. “I would not have the job I have today if I had not been able to get through those (math-related) courses,” says McLeod.

If there is one thing parents and students won’t scrimp on, even during the height of a recession, it’s education. Private tutoring is a booming industry in North America and has seen little impact from the economic downturn.

The U.S.-based organization Edu-Ventures estimates the size of the tutoring industry in America is between \$5 billion and \$7 billion annually, while the Education Industry Association reports spending on private tutors continues to grow at about five per cent a year, down only slightly from eight to 10 per cent recorded in 2007.

For Deanna Barrell, a Calgary parent of two children, one in elementary school and the other in high school, the expense of hiring a private tutor was a no-brainer.

“It’s the best money ever spent,” says Barrell, who also hired Ridout. “I wouldn’t even think twice. If I can help my kids to learn, I don’t hesitate.”

She views the cost as small change compared to the long-term investment in her children’s future careers. The return on investment may not be immediate, but it will pay off down the road as they secure higher-paying jobs as a result of being able to get higher levels of education. When Ridout began teaching math at Mount Royal about nine years ago, she saw students struggling with the subject and decided to offer tutoring between classes. As people in the com-

munity heard about her services, demand grew and she began to hire additional tutors as she founded Education Wise four years ago.

“Every year since, I’ve expanded and hired more tutors,” says Ridout. “This last summer, I worked harder than I ever worked during the school year.”

She revamped her training program for new tutors, established strict standards based on accountability with a satisfaction guarantee and says the motivation for most customers is the same.

“Most parents want tutoring for their children because they’re thinking of the long-term happiness of their child — what kind of careers are going to be available when they’re older? — and they want their children to be confident,” says Ridout.

The cost of hiring a tutor varies widely, but the average cost tends to be about \$40 to \$60 per hour, although some companies charge as high as \$100 or more.

Ridout says parents and students need to research their tutors and find out exactly what they’re getting for their money.

Sometimes help from a parent or teacher can only go so far, which is where private tutors fill a need.

Ridout and many others offer one-on-one, in-home tutoring sessions and an analysis of the students’ specific needs, with ongoing support.

“We’re not just trying to help a student get a good grade,” she says. “We’re trying to mentor them a little bit so they feel they have a support person.”