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# Toronto's Ryerson University Unveils Suzanne Rogers Fashion Institute

The institute will start in September and will involve six recent graduates from Ryerson's fashion program.

By [Constance Droganes](#) on November 29, 2016



📷 Ryerson student Ekaterina (Katerina) Kuzheleva, the first recipient of The Suzanne Rogers Undergraduate Award, with Suzanne Rogers.  
Photo by Lawrence Cortez

**TORONTO** — As Canadian designers continue to grapple with the loss of Toronto's Fashion Week, which abruptly folded earlier this year, philanthropist Suzanne Rogers and Ryerson University are opening a new door of opportunity for the country's "next generation" of design talent next year.

Last month, Toronto's Ryerson University unveiled the launch of The Suzanne Rogers Fashion Institute (SRFI), Canada's first postgraduate fashion-design program.

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The program itself, which will kick into gear in September, sprang to life thanks to a 1 million Canadian dollars, or \$744,000, donation from The Edward and Suzanne Rogers Foundation to Ryerson's Faculty of Communication and Design. The endowment was celebrated in Toronto on Nov. 28 in a special ceremony led by Mayor John Tory.

Yet Rogers, a longtime supporter of Canadian fashion, is looking beyond these early accolades and to the future, where she hopes to see every student selected for the fellowship program become international stars.

"I don't have a degree in fashion. But I love Canadian designers," the daughter-in-law of late media mogul Ted Rogers said.

"In recent years, I've talked to many designers and have learned how difficult Canada's industry has become, especially for newcomers to it. That put a whole different spin on Canada's fashion landscape for me," said Rogers, who currently sponsors the Toronto Fashion Incubator's 25,000 Canadian dollars, or \$18,600, Suzanne Rogers Award for Most Promising New Label — the largest cash prize in Canada's industry.

"The truth is, fashion students in this country don't get the kind of financial support needed to launch a career," said Rogers. "So one day, while I was attending Ryerson's graduate show, I started thinking about how I could help."

Up to six top students and recent graduates from Ryerson's fashion program will be selected to participate in SRFI's inaugural school year next year. That list will include a fourth-year Ryerson student Ekaterina (Katerina) Kuzheleva, the first recipient of The Suzanne Rogers Undergraduate Award.

The prize, valued at 6,500 Canadian dollars, or \$4,800, was presented to Kuzheleva during a closed event last week.

All fellows will have access to master classes led by national and international fashion experts; mentorship by Ryerson's designer-in-residence, Wayne Clark, and funding to participate in national and international fashion competitions.

SRFI's final cut, which will be revealed next summer, will also have access to an advisory committee comprised of nine industry insiders who can connect students with international



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schools and design houses where they can further their studies  
or get paid internships.

That advisory committee includes Canadian TV host Jeanne Beker; designers David Dixon and Todd Lynn; Toronto Fashion Incubator executive director Susan Langdon; bespoke tailor Don Fabien Lee; Canadian Arts & Fashion Awards president Vicky Milner; Toronto Men's Fashion Week founder Jeff Rustia; former Flare editor in chief Lisa Tant, and Suzanne Timmins, the senior vice president and fashion director at Hudson's Bay and Lord & Taylor.

"This is the legacy project for Suzanne and myself," said Robert Ott, chair of the School of Fashion at Ryerson University, who developed the concept for this institute with Rogers over the past two years. "This new program isn't linear, where you start school, finish your studies and get a job. It was designed to transition Ryerson's third- and fourth-year talent from an educational setting into today's industry.

"SRFI bridges the gap between school and these early years of a designer's career. That's definitely new for Canada," he added.

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