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When Gregory Kaminsky first took up engraving as a hobby, little did he know that it would become the foundation for his very successful business, Gregory Signs, in Downsview.

It's an immigrant success story that now has him doing work for the likes of Gucci and Donald Trump.

Kaminsky struggled when he first moved from Russia to Canada in 1978, holding down jobs ranging from mechanical engineering to pizza delivery. While working as an engineer at the CIBC building in 1981, he bought a jewelry engraving machine and took up engraving in his basement to pass the time.

From there, it was a short step to turning that into a professional side project.

"He started out small serving a lot of local businesses and retailers with small jobs," said his son, Boris, who also works for Gregory Signs. "He did anything from door addresses to name badges for desks to awnings and canopies."

Because of the variety of requests, Kaminsky has become skilled at working with all kinds of materials, from metal to vinyl, wood to neon tubing.

Though his work began humbly, Kaminsky's talent at engraving caught on and word spread. By 1983, he had started his own business, with a full shop, to keep up with demand. He brought in other engravers on a contract basis once the orders became too plentiful for him to handle all the business on his own.

"The business has been expanding ever since," the younger Kaminsky said. "We've taken on all kinds of projects of all different sizes, rendering, and most recently we've started creating logos from scratch."

Some of Gregory Signs' most notable works around Toronto include signage for Ikea, the LCBO, Cadillac Fairview and the Hospital for Sick Children. Internationally, the company has done work for such prominent companies and landmarks as Gucci, and the Donald Trump-owned Trump Parc and Trump Plaza.

"There are always offers coming in and always new challenges," Boris said. "It's great because we get to meet so many different people from so many walks of life, whether they own a restaurant or bar, a hotel or a bank."

With the runaway success of its North York office, Gregory Signs has already compiled a book of designs for potential franchisees, with an eye to bringing the company to other cities. That will open up new markets, though there is some difficulty into compiling all the different services provided into one simple manual.

"Our business is hardly even engraving anymore because there's so much other stuff," Boris said. "There are so many elements that go into it. It's not just design, but style, material and how we can go about best meeting the customers' needs."

With the future looking bright, Boris added that Gregory Signs is always looking to find new and exciting challenges.

"It's something we really enjoy, and it's not very often you can be successful doing something you really enjoy."

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Gregory Signs is located at 672 Petrolia Rd. For more information on the business, visit their website at www.gregorysigns.com