

last year of high school, the family moved to Hope, B.C.

She finished high school at the age of 16 and studied university science and math at Fraser Valley College because of her scientific interest in aviation. Then she decided to get some practical experience and successfully earned her private pilot's licence a year later.

"I decided that I like flying so much that I quit university and became a commercial pilot," Knell said.

The 18-year-old started off as a bush pilot flying loggers into camp in the Chilliwack area of British Columbia. Since she was only paid for the time spent in the cockpit — not for any ground time spent preparing for the flight — Knell decided to supplement her income by earning her flight instructor's licence.

A year later, she started teaching air force office cadets and other beginners who were working on their pilot's licence.

Knell moved to Victoria, B.C. to become the mountain flying instructor.

"Any licensed pilot wanting to rent an

aircraft to fly through the mountains had to take my course," she said proudly. "Flying through the mountains is quite a bit different than flying and navigating over flatter terrain, even for experienced pilots."

In 1980, she married Jim, who was employed as a field engineer with the Canadian military. The couple moved to CFB Trenton for a stint, then Cold Lake, Alta., before returning in the early 1990s to CFB Trenton.

Over those dozen years, Knell raised two children, Andrea and Derek, and continued instructing pilots at the various bases and airports where they lived.

"I was the last chief flying instructor at the Trenton Flying Club at CFB Trenton in the late 1980s. I was also chief flying instructor of the Belleville Flying Club."

Knell gave up flying in 1992 when she took a job as licensing officer with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, overseeing training programs at flying schools.

"In my career, I did a lot of flying cross country and charter trips in everything from a Cessna 150 to a DC3 twin engine commuter plane. I even got to fly the F18 simulator at Cold Lake and the Herc simulator at CFB Trenton. I crashed the Herc on landing," she said with a laugh. "It takes a lot of practice."

In real life, though, she once landed upside down in the Fraser River in a Piper Cherokee and was pulled to safety by the student who was flying the plane. Knell took control of the small aircraft during an emergency procedure when it crashed and sunk into the river.

"My outlook on life changed that day in 1979. I live for today, but plan for tomorrow. That's guided me ever since."

When Knell's contract ended with the transportation ministry, she joined the Belleville Green Check program as the industrial, commercial and institutional coordinator for energy, water and waste reduction.

Provincial funding killed the program about a year later and Knell started her own environmental consulting business.

Within a few months of that, Knell started The Green Home Centre in Cannifton and moved it to the 8,000 square foot Bell Boulevard location in 1998.

"My husband retired from the military six years ago and now works for me," she laughed.

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