

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Louis Charlebois is a people person

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer
Getting involved with people is Louis Charlebois' way of living. "You only get out of a community what you put into it," he says, "and we always

like to get involved."

In the five years since he and his wife, Flo, bought their Elmore Drive home in Acton, Mr. Charlebois has spent two years as president of Acton's Chamber of Commerce, be-

longs to the Acton Rotary Club and is on the Town Hall Restoration Committee. He is also a member of the Guelph Toastmaster's Club and served on the Halton Hills Industrial Committee along with John Goy and George Gray, before Bill Marshall was appointed as industrial commissioner for the region.

He was just as involved in Newmarket and Truro, his former hometowns. When the Charlebois went looking for a home near Toronto, they had never heard of Acton and didn't know where Georgetown was. A smart real estate agent told them he had a house that might interest them in Acton and pointed out that Acton was only 10 miles west of Georgetown.

"If he'd said 10 miles east of Guelph, we wouldn't even have looked at it," Mr. Charlebois laughs. "Guelph seemed half way across Ontario. But another 10 minutes beyond Georgetown. That wasn't worth worrying about. You don't realize how close to Guelph we are at first. The agent was smart the way he described Acton's location to us."

As Ontario sales manager for Sico Paints, the country's largest Canadian-owned paint manufacturing company, Mr. Charlebois finds that people are very much a part of his life.

"I'd make the worst marketing manager in the world," he jokes. "I couldn't sit in an

office and analyze everything. I like to go out and meet the public."

Mr. Charlebois was raised in a "retail business environment" because his father owned a hardware store in Iroquois Falls, Ontario.

"Dad taught us that the customer was always right and we had to meet the public with a smile," he says.

HEINZ SALESMAN

Although he says he only worked in the store after school or on holidays, Mr. Charlebois' experience with the public stood him in good stead when he became a salesman for H.J. Heinz.

Part of his 14 years with the company were spent in Hearst, where he met and married his wife, and the rest in Rouyn and Noranda where he was transferred to sell through northern Quebec.

For the first 15 years of their marriage, Mrs. Charlebois says her husband left Monday and returned Friday of each week.

He left Heinz to sell for CIL and stayed in northern Quebec for the first couple of years. From there he went to Toronto. A promotion to advertising supervisor saw him move to Truro, Nova Scotia for two and a half years.

He was transferred back to Ontario as sales supervisor for south-western Ontario five years ago.

The Charlebois say they have always lived in smaller communities and that's what

they like.

Moving from the north required a big adjustment, he says. They had to learn to cope with traffic, and the pace of life was faster. Even the pace and way in which business was conducted was different.

"Businessmen were much more professional, more serious, in the south," he says. "There was none of the buddy-buddy attitude like there was in the north. What we experienced as salesman up north 20 years ago was so backward."

Today, business habits have changed and the northern businessman is just as modern as the southern one, he finds. Improved transportation means that a businessman can fly south to Toronto for a day and be back home that night. The difference created by the north's isolation no longer have any meaning.

The Charlebois found Nova Scotia a more relaxed place to live and they did enjoy it. Nevertheless, coming back to busy Ontario was a good change.

"I think I need that high of getting up and going off to work by eight o'clock every morning," he says. "But then, by six o'clock, I'm ready to relax."

Relaxing means playing golf, cross-country skiing or working on the house. Mr. Charlebois worked for a paint firm and enjoys testing out their products, according to Mrs. Charlebois.

"I tell our salesmen they

should try our products themselves," he agrees. "It's so much easier to sell something once you know for yourself how good it is."

SALES MANAGER

Mr. Charlebois left CIL to join Sico two years ago. He is Ontario sales manager for the company and is proud of the fact it has just bought CV in Toronto and a small company in the United States. It also has four plants in Quebec. Since the head offices are in Montreal and Quebec City, he travels a lot.

"I had just made the switch before the Quebec election that brought in Levesque," he recalls, "and I'll never forget hearing the news in my hotel room in Quebec that he had won. I really wondered how stupid a move it had been for me."

A lot of Quebec money is leaving the province, he says. Levesque's plans have made a lot of Quebec companies realize that it would be safer to broaden their scope.

"A lot of Quebecers tended to isolate themselves," he says. "They sympathized with us for living in Ontario."

The Charlebois, however, found no handicap in being Ontario Francophones. They had their own schools and churches, and French was used as readily as English in the stores and industries.

While he sensed considerable backlash in Ontario over Rene Levesque and the question of separation when it was

first raised two years ago, Mr. Charlebois believes that's easing up today. He finds English-speaking people more sympathetic and understanding than they were originally. The resentment and sarcasm are disappearing as knowledge and information increase on the subject.

If he walks into a call on a businessman he has not met before, Mr. Charlebois now finds him wanting to talk about separation and often has to cut him off to get down to business.

Many people seem to assume that if you're French, you have to be from Quebec, he finds.

"A lot of people tell me they spent the weekend in my hometown," he laughs. "When I say 'You're in Iroquois Falls?' they look at me and shake their heads. They were in Montreal. They've never heard of Iroquois Falls."

Personally, Mr. Charlebois says he can sympathize with Quebecers to a certain extent because they were denied the use of their language on the job in many instances. They lose his sympathy, however, if they become too radical.

"It always seemed easy for us to make friends," he says. "I think 90 per cent of it is in your attitude. If your attitude is such that you flare up every time someone says something to you, it defeats the whole purpose of trying to make others understand your problems."

Although she had no pre-

vious business experience, Mrs. Charlebois had her own store opened within three months of moving to Acton. It was his wife's shop that got Mr. Charlebois into the Chamber of Commerce.

There were three empty stores on Main Street when the Charlebois came to town, and circumstances combined just perfectly so that she was able to open her doors much more quickly than expected. She runs Toys to Teens and considers that raising five daughters have given her plenty of experience in knowing what is quality merchandise worth putting on an active youngster.

OPENED SHOP

Dave Sweetman asked Mr. Charlebois if he would be interested in joining the Chamber since his wife was a merchant. Bingo! Involved again.

The fact that he was president of the Chamber of Commerce when initial efforts were being made to preserve Acton's old town hall, lead Mr. Charlebois to join the Restoration Committee. Plans that could well solve the fund-raising problems seem almost complete, but he isn't talking about them until the fund-raising committee is ready to release them.

His eldest daughter is married and teaches French at Stewarttown Senior school but the four younger girls are still students, ranging from St. Joseph's Separate School age to university.



LOUIS CHARLEBOIS

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