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Hide House leathers per-'suede' buyers

By CHRIS AAGAARD
 Herald Staff Writer

It's impossible to go into Acton's recently opened Olde Hide House on Eastern Avenue while killing time for another appointment. The sheer size and variety of this unique leather and wooden furniture store located in a turn-of-the-century hide warehouse make it more of an adventure than a place for a quick stop.

Once inside, you are over-

whelmed by the rich smell of leather and pine furniture. And the array of everything from coats and sheepskins to hats, gloves and wallets and boots—all made of quality hides, some tanned locally—are spread over the store's 8,000 square feet of floor space.

The furniture, handmade and tooled at the store's cabinet shop to the right of the leather goods, is carefully copied from Canada's history. Combined with some of the

leather goods on sale in another part of the store, the affect whisks shoppers back to the 19th century.

Hide House spokesman Fred Dawkins told The Herald last week that the store's owners hope their business will help promote Acton's lagging historical image as a leather town, in much the same way similar operations in Blythe, Ontario, have added to that community's character.

"We're trying to promote leather because leather in this town has been put forward as a negative thing," Mr. Dawkins explained, recalling age-old complaints from visitors and new residents about the smell emanating from Acton's Beardsmore tannery, at one time the largest operation of its kind in the commonwealth.

"Leather at the tannery stage is looked down upon," he said, "but leather as a finished product is highly respected."

And the Hide House is already a strong corporate citizen, buying many goods made from hides tanned in Acton and employing about 30 full and part-time people to run the store. At the moment, five cabinetmakers work in the furniture shop adjacent to the leather showroom.

But, Mr. Dawkins said, more local participation is needed from other businesses and local artisans to help put Acton on the map as a leather town and community tourist attraction which the region lacks.

"We'd like to see more merchants getting involved with the leather theme," Mr. Dawkins said. "If the concept is to succeed, it would be much better if the town got together to develop the thing."

Town council recently granted the store Sunday



Jerry Heagle of Acton's Olde Hide House woodworking shop sets a saw blade before going to work on one of dozens of pieces of furniture soon available for sale at the store. Although the store employs five cabinetmakers, Mr. Heagle said that business is good enough to make room for as many as 15 woodworkers and furniture refinishers. The Olde Hide House is located on Eastern Avenue off Highway 7 in Acton's east end.

operating hours to help catch the weekend "sight-seer" flow to the rural areas surrounding Toronto and major cities like Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo in southeastern Ontario.

While store management has some major ideas about developing the "emporium" concept of the Hide House, which include adding a lounge and leather-tannery type museum in a warehouse connected to the rear of the building, Mr. Dawkins said he would like to see the store promote the work of local craftsmen.

"People are gradually coming out of the woodwork," Mr. Dawkins said, "planning us with craft ideas such as sculpting with leather, painting on leather and small crafts. But we really haven't had much response yet."

Meanwhile the Hide House's woodworking shop has already begun to turn out attractive pine and oak replicas of pioneer-style bed sets, hutch-

es, mirrors and even a couple of parson's benches located in the store for foot-weary shoppers.

As one carpenter explained, "We'll try anything and custom work is available."

Except for veneer cabinet backing and drawer bottoms, all the furniture is made of solid wood and machines are only used to cut, router and turn the lathe on which bedposts are hand-tooled.

An official grand opening is planned for this Wednesday with an 8:30 p.m. public fashion show. But with 90 per cent of its leather stock in, the Hide House is already doing business from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Saturday and from 10 a.m. to nine in the evening on Thursday and Friday. The store is also open from noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

Located in Acton's east end, the Olde Hide House occupies a large warehouse south of Highway 7 next to the Canadian National Railway tracks.

Poetic tribute to president Kennedy

EDITOR'S NOTE: U.S. President John Kennedy was assassinated 17 years ago this week on an infamous day that left everyone reeling with shock. Halton Hills' Shirley Joseph was moved to express some sentiments about the event in a poem she wrote for her school-age son. Now, several years later, she has submitted the poem for publication to commemorate the much-loved president's death in Dallas.

It was a sun crisp morn as he stepped from the plane, but earlier that day there had been rain. The crowds were cheering as he got in the car. An assassin was waiting not very far. A smile on his face as he waved from his seat. The blood red sun, the November heat. This was a man with a dream to be done. To mould a nation that was second to none. Along the route they gathered in lines. The gun was raised, the man in sight. The crowd was sparse, the time was right. A crack rang out, a hole in his head. Ten seconds later, a leader was dead.

Grand opening Wednesday



Dawn Aldrich and Janis Fread hold up two styles of the leather coats available at the Olde Hide House, which unofficially opened Nov. 14 on Acton's Eastern Avenue. Covering 8,000 square feet of floor space in an aging leather warehouse, the leather goods portion of the combined leather and furniture shop, features a wide variety of products made from quality hides, including boots, hats and belts for urban cowboys. The Hide House is already doing business if you want to get your Christmas shopping done early, and a grand opening fashion show is planned for next Wednesday.

(Herald photos by Chris Aagaard)

Driving safety is big topic

This is the Silver Anniversary of "Safe Driving Week" in Canada, and the Canada Safety Council is hoping every Canadian driver will make the 25th event very special by taking every precaution to see there is not one single traffic death in Canada during the period Dec. 1 to 7.

Can it be done?

It means a change of attitude for many drivers. A little extra caution for some. More courtesy for others. Close attention to the rules for all. Here are some basic good driving habits we all know when we think about them, but are apt to forget from time to time:

- Be extra courteous to other road users, including pedestrians.
- Obey traffic laws and regulations.
- Adjust driving habits to winter conditions.
- Maintain a safe following distance behind the vehicle ahead.
- Keep the vehicle in sound mechanical condition.
- Use safety belt systems, and ensure children use child restraint system.
- Avoid speeding by allowing sufficient time for a journey.

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