

Hobby business now thriving enterprise

Fourteen years ago, Marg Tanas began a small in-home secretarial service, which was intended to keep her shorthand and typing skills sharp.

Today, that basic concept has grown to become Georgetown Secretarial Service, and the business has expanded to a degree that it now includes an office supply business, as well.

In the beginning, Ms. Tanas' concept was simple enough. She accepted typing work and other secretarial duties that could be completed in her home, thus enabling her to care for her six-month old baby.

But it wasn't long before a "hobby business" became a thriving operation.

GSS assists people in a variety of ways. At the company's offices, located at 348 Guelph St., employees handle everything from basic typing and copying work, to phone answering service and telex communications.

The office is also equipped for Fax transmissions, a network which allows photocopies, diagrams, or drawings to be reproduced at points all over the world.

The placement division of GSS provides secretaries for fill-in service where they are required by clients. Employees of GSS are sometimes placed in permanent secretarial positions, too.

Ms. Tanas opened the office supplies division of her company five years ago, after recognizing the great need for such a service in Georgetown, for both the commercial and industrial sectors.

"There was no one to offer the extent of office supplies we now do in Georgetown," she says. "Commer-

cial and industrial companies had to get their supplies outside the community before."

GSS provides all types of office supplies, as well as office furniture, equipment such as typewriters and calculators, portable photocopiers, and computer supplies. Orders for wedding invitations are also handled by GSS.

Much of the company's business is derived from the Georgetown area. However, GSS also supplies companies in Acton, Milton, Erin, Brampton, Mississauga, and Toronto with materials.

A company van ensures orders are filled quickly, and delivery is free. Service is one area Ms. Tanas feels they excel in.

"I think service is the top quality of our company," she says. "Service is where we've gained the most ground. But, of course, we have to be competitively priced, as well."

The office supplies division of GSS has a staff of six, and Ms. Tanas has high praise for her employees.

"No business can exist without a good staff. I've had many compliments on how well my staff deals with the public. That's been a major part of the success of this company, in both the office supplies and secretarial divisions."

As both a business owner, and the president of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce Ms. Tanas recognizes the need to make advancements in her operation, and the community as a whole.

"Living and working in Georgetown, I'm very supportive of the community. There are lots of opportunities, if we tap into them."

"But I believe you can get into trouble if you don't build on a controlled basis. Steady growth is important."

By MARY-LIZ SHAW
Herald Staff

A little over three years ago Michael Wong was a disillusioned management consultant trapped in a job that took him to Halifax every weekend, leaving him little time to spend with his family and friends.

Now he is a successful Georgetown businessman, owner of Connoisseur's Court, who has turned his love of ceramics into his life's work.

The small shop at 50 Main Street contains unique novelty items and elegant Japanese floral arrangements. Passers-by are immediately drawn to the classical music blaring from a tiny speaker sitting on the edge of the sidewalk.

"I've had a lot of comments on the music," Mr. Wong said. "People will be dancing down the street and they'll tell me it is so pleasant to hear good music while they're shopping."

Mr. Wong decided to open his business three years ago after an unsuccessful stint job-hunting. His wife had taken up ceramics while he was travelling back and forth to Halifax.

"A friend of mine owned a building in Georgetown," Mr. Wong said. "The rents were so low here, I couldn't pass it up. I really decided to take a chance because I felt I had nothing to lose."

Business has grown steadily ever since and his services have expanded. Although most of his original stock was ceramics, Mr. Wong said he now deals primarily in special floral arrangements, based on the Japanese style known as Ikebana.

"They have simple, defined lines, very appealing to the eye," he said. "Customers will often bring in their own vases and have me design arrangements for them."

Mr. Wong attributes his success to the uniqueness of his stock, which includes a peacock feather costume ball mask and brightly coloured feather boas, and to his devotion to individual customer service.



Cold outside? Who would know? Mike Wong of Connoisseur's Court in Georgetown sits at his piano which he often plays to entertain his customers. His Main Street shop specializes in custom-made ceramics and flower arrangements. (Photo by Mary-Liz Shaw)

"I try to stay away from importers who sell in bulk to large companies such as The Bay or Zellers. I'd rather look for the unusual. I have things that you would be hard pressed to find even in Toronto."

Impeccably dressed in a grey pinstriped suit and pink shirt, Mr. Wong's sales style is relaxed and friendly. He enjoys entertaining his customers by playing the upright piano sitting in the middle of the tiny shop.

Although Mr. Wong describes his customers as representing a cross-section of the community, he has at-

tracted people from Toronto, Brampton and Mississauga. Word-of-mouth, he said, is his best form of advertising.

"Someone will go into a home which has one of my arrangements and she'll like it. The next week, that person is in my shop."

Mr. Wong has been building up his Christmas stock to set up a permanent Christmas ornament and gift section. He has also imported unusual replicas of 18th and 19th century guns, pistols and swords.

are entirely workable."

Perhaps the most unique of these items is a miniature replica of a medieval crossbow with an iron arrow.

Mr. Wong has just completed interior decoration for two offices and he is hoping to do more of them.

"I think professionals realize that most of our life is spent at the office and it should be a more pleasant, relaxing atmosphere," he said. "An environment that is calm and pleasing to the eye puts customers at ease and probably increase productivity."

Firm benefits from declining dollar

By SANDY CAMPBELL
Herald Staff

The decline of the Canadian dollar is the cause of a boom for at least one Acton business.

In the last three years, sales of Commercial Shearing Ltd. have increased over 50 per cent, said David Roberts, managing director of the 6 Commerce Crescent business.

Commercial Shearing supplies many Canadian companies with hydraulic gear pumps, motors and direction control valves.

Most dump trucks have hydraulic components manufactured by Commercial Shearing. Machines used in refuse, mining, construction, shipping and utilities have parts supplied by the Acton business. "Almost all Ontario trucks have one or two components of ours," Mr. Roberts said.

The comparative low price of the Canadian dollar is benefitting Commercial Shearing, because 20 to 30 per cent of what they make ends up

in machines shipped to the United States. "Things have changed since eight to ten years ago when a dollar was a dollar was a dollar," Mr. Roberts said at the exchange rate.

Commercial Shearing is a worldwide company with sales in 1986 to \$275 million. Parts made at the Acton business are sent across Canada to Commercial Shearing distribution centres. There are seven such centres in Ontario alone.

The Acton outlet was established in 1973 and employs 18 people, machinists, assemblers, testers, shippers and office personal make up that staff.

Parts are machined, assembled and tested in Acton. Designs come from the United States.

In 1987 the company will be introducing some new products which should increase business. "They are technically superior to other products, and we are now showing them to our customers," Mr. Roberts said. Because of secrecy needed in

the competitive market, he was unwilling to discuss these latest developments.

Hydraulic parts for mobile machinery is a very competitive business. There are about 12 companies in direct competition with Commercial Shearing, and three or four are larger than Commercial Shearing. Many of the companies have merged or will merge for survival.

"Hopefully there will only be three or four left soon, and we will be one of them," Mr. Roberts said.

When Commercial Shearing came looking for a location in southern Ontario they were originally considering the St. Catharines area. "We were looking for a small community with a stable work force."

Acton had the people, the property was available and it is still close enough to Toronto," Mr. Roberts said. A big part of Commercial Shearing's business is in Southern Ontario.

plan to expand the Acton plant in 1987. They do plan to have another good year. New designs are part of that optimism. Traditionally high quality is another.

The body of a Commercial Shearing part is "very rugged, all cast iron. It's not cheap but moderately priced," Mr. Roberts said. Other companies make their bodies out of aluminum, which may not be as heavy, but is also less reliable, he said.

The name Commercial Shearing has been around for 66 years. Originally the business cut steel into strips. Cutting steel cut steel into strips. The companies first effort into hydraulics was manufacturing a dump truck that would dump in three directions, from the back and both sides. Soon they stopped making the trucks and were making hydraulic parts only. Today Commercial Shearing is a leader in the design of hydraulic machinery, Mr. Roberts said.



GSS Office Supplies carries a wide range of materials, and services many companies in Georgetown and the surrounding area. Marg Tanas, right, is the owner of the business, while Pat Barr is her assistant. (Herald photo)

Frank Heller and Co.

The best half of the leather industry

By SANDY CAMPBELL
Herald Staff

Taking the worst half of a cow hide and making it equal to the best half is one way Acton's Frank Heller and Company made a name for themselves in the leather industry.

The company on McDonald Boulevard has been in Acton for over 20 years and employs 225 people. "We could be the biggest producer of splits in Canada and North America," said Mike MacPhee, the controller (chief accountant) of the Acton business.

Splits is a term used to describe what happens to the cow hide; it is split in two. There is the outer layer, which is considered to be the best part, and there is the inner layer.

"The outer layer is considered better. It is easier to work with," Mr. MacPhee said. "We've developed expertise in finishing split leather (the inner layer)," he said.

After the Acton tannery is finished with the inner hide it can be used for

Block Parents unite forces

Block Parents of Acton and Georgetown want to amalgamate their two groups into one.

Although originally formed to help prevent child molestings and abductions, the Block Parent Program has grown and expanded since its inception in London, Ontario in 1968.

Across Canada the familiar red and white sign is displayed in the windows of more than 300,000 homes

just about anything: boots, hand bags, gloves. Foot wear is the real test for leather, Mr. MacPhee said.

The leather in a shoe has to absorb impact and not crack or peel. For years the Frank Heller product has stood up to those tests and has the confidence of the footwear industry, Mr. MacPhee said. Greb, Kaufman, Cougar and Bata are some of the names in footwear they deal with.

The Heller name is recognized in North America for the work they do with inner hides. Only an expert could tell the difference between a finished Heller hide and the more valuable outer hide, Mr. MacPhee said. A Heller hide is a little less expensive.

Frank Heller did not live to see the success his company has had recently. He died in 1969. Carrying on the family name within the company is his son Ron Heller, who is the vice-president of production and a life long resident of Acton.

On an average week 350,000 square feet of hide is processed at Frank Heller. That's about 175,000 hides a month, Mr. MacPhee said.

The tannery specializes in custom orders. A customer will come with a sample of the color he would like, and the tannery will come up with the color to match the order. A color that seems to be popular among manufacturers this year is khaki, Mr. MacPhee said.

For the range of colored leather that has to be produced, Frank Heller needs a research department. The number of researchers fluctuates depending upon the orders.

Researchers are also needed to produce samples for customers, Mr. MacPhee said.

Business has been steady at Frank Heller. But like the now closed Beardmore tannery, Frank Heller is experiencing the effects of the relaxed tariffs on imported foot wear.

"There are no tariffs any longer and shoe manufacturing in Canada is next to nil," Mr. MacPhee said. Work boots and winter boots are the stronger areas of the Canadian foot wear industry.

The Beardmore closing did not affect Frank Heller, Mr. MacPhee said. They did hire some Beardmore employees though.

Mr. MacPhee does not predict any major growth for the company in 1987. "The company has good orders logged for 1987. I am optimistic about the product," he said.

Frank Heller's markets are mainly in Ontario and Quebec. They also have customers across Canada and in the United States.

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