

Growth is steady for Acton plant whose specialty is wood products

Thanks to Toronto Wood Treating Ltd. backyard do-it-yourself projects are achieving a monumental status.

They are monuments to the family that builds them, and they are monuments because they last. The Acton company produces treated wood which is guaranteed for 40 years.

Toronto Wood Treating has its main location on Wallace Street, another on Queen Street and a retail yard (operated in the summer) on Highway 7. The wood they produce is dry to the touch and odor free. It is made from a unique formula that clings to the fibres in the wood, said Dave Phipps, president and general manager of the company.

Since Toronto Wood Treating came to Acton 10 years ago, the wood treating business has grown so much the Acton business has been unable to retain their initial share of the market, said Mr. Phipps. More decks, fences and patios are being made of the treated green wood every year.

In the fall of 1976, when Toronto Wood Treating moved to Acton, there were four other wood treating plants in Ontario. Today there are 13.

Not all those plants offer the range of products Acton's wood treating plant offers. In addition to the green wood called All Weather Wood, Toronto Wood Treating produces a brown wood, Sunwood, Flame Proof Wood.

Sunwood is treated with the same proven formula of the green wood, only the color and price is different. Sunwood is five per cent more expensive than All Weather, the green wood.

Toronto Wood Treating is the only firm in Ontario making the brown treated wood Mr. Phipps said. They began making it the spring of 1986. Deerhurst Lake in Muskoka is covered in Sunwood.

Sunwood was created because "a

lot of people said, 'I like the product, but I wish it wasn't green'," Mr. Phipps said.

Flame Proof wood is another trademark of Toronto Wood Treating. As the name suggests, this wood will not burn. It is used for special projects, Mr. Phipps said. When Hamilton Place was built fire proof wood had to be brought from Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. Now that kind of wood is available through Acton.

Sunwood and Flame Proof wood make up less than ten per cent of Toronto Wood Treating sales. Most of the sales, 65 per cent, are the green wood sold to retail stores for private use. About 25 per cent of sales to contractors who use the wood on large scale projects, such as posts for highway barriers.

Growth has been steady for the Acton company over the last 10 years. Their market is as east as Kingston, west as Windsor, south as Toronto and north as Huntsville. The United States have their own wood treating plants.

Toronto Wood Treating has expanded to the United States but will do so less since the agreement with the United States and the rise in export taxes on Canadian softwood Mr. Phipps said. Business to the United States has never been significant, he said.

In the summer months Toronto Wood Treating has a very local market. They open a retail yard on Highway 7 on the Guelph side of Acton. Students run the yard and during these months the staff of the business grows from about 20 to 25, Mr. Phipps said.

Free books to help the backyard patio or fence builder are available through Toronto Wood Treating. The books are supplied by the Campbellville company that makes the chemicals the wood is treated with. Last year the Acton firm distributed 20,000 books, which is a monumental task.

Artecast

An artistic craft in a unique field

It takes a certain personality to deal with artists, and Eric Knoespel of Artecast has it.

The 53-year-old Ilmehouse resident has been dealing with artists for nearly 22 years.

Although Mr. Knoespel isn't an artist, he likes art, and knows how to talk to artists on their level.

"I remember the John Diefenbaker statue we just cast. You wouldn't believe the criticism it got - the nose is too big, the head too small - petty stuff. That's one thing you shouldn't ever do, because what is right or wrong in art is almost impossible to say. Professional artists know what they want. They have definite ideas," Mr. Knoespel said.

The Diefenbaker statue stands on Ottawa's Parliament Hill, a tribute to a former prime minister of Canada. It was cast at Artecast, and is the work of artist Leo Mol of Winnipeg.

Artists are not your average citizen, and you have to make allowances for them sometimes. They can be temperamental at times, and talk in different wave lengths, Mr. Knoespel said.

However, Mr. Knoespel holds a great deal of respect for them, particularly for their dedication to their art.

"Their dedication is unbelievable," he exclaimed. "They can barely survive economically, yet still they will go buy expensive castings."

Dealing with artists wasn't what Mr. Knoespel anticipated he would be doing, 22 years ago when he and two others started up Mid Canadian Investment Castings Ltd. in Georgetown.

Located where the McDonald's Restaurant is now on Mountainview Road, the fledgling foundry started to grow so that within a year it moved to Mountainview Road, where Cercor now stands. Cercor was the new name the company took on

when it was a year old.

The occasional bronze casting for an artist increased as word got out that here was a company that does the lost wax process.

"We were doing it for the fun of it, but it got to the point where more and more people came out, and so we decided we would create a new department," Mr. Knoespel said. Of the three partners, he had the most aptitude for dealing with artists, and so became his baby.

However, as Cercor developed, there was less and less time and space available for accommodating the needs of artists, and Cercor decided to close that division.

That was the turning point for Mr. Knoespel.

"I thought, why don't I break out of here and run Artecast as a separate company. I sold my shares to my two partners and made Artecast a separate company," the father of three said.

That was in 1979. The rest is a list of famous Canadian artists, beginning with Almut Luetkenhaus of Oakville who had all the pieces for her first show cast by Artecast. That was a major undertaking for the new company.

She returned to Artecast in 1983 to bronze cast one of the largest projects undertaken by the firm, a huge, goldplated sun for the backyard of an Ottawa resident.

Who are some of the other artists Mr. Knoespel has worked with? They are: Frances Gage of Toronto, Bill McElcheran of Toronto, Bruce Watson of Toronto, Walter Bachinski of Guelph, Gerald Gladstone, Jordi Bonet of Montreal, Augustin Filipovic, Leo Mol of Winnipeg, Joe Rosenthal, Arto Tchakmakjian of Montreal, Esther Wertheimer, Elizabeth Holbrook of Dundas, Dora De Pedery Hunt, John Reynolds, Helen Granger Young of Winnipeg, Gord Smith, and Lea Vival of Kleinburg.



In the cool basement of the Dominion Seed House, nursery and farm workers Paul Thompson (left) and

Phillip Callus count hybrid lily bulbs. (Herald photo)



Organic controls for garden pests are gaining popularity every year. Dominion Seed House General Manager Doug Peck says. The long-

time employee finds jack rabbits the hardest to control on the 63-acre Seed House property, especially where beans and corn are grown. (Herald photo)

With 63 acres, Dominion seed firm is more than a backyard operation

By ANI PEDEBIAN

All but the "Yuppie" generation can be counted among the customers of the Dominion Seed House, says its general manager.

"That is one group that's more interested in boats, cottages and travelling," the kindly Doug Peck smiles. "They're missing out. But the generation since that one, the younger ones, are planting even though they may only have a small area."

Mr. Peck may have been the Georgetown seed company's general manager for only five years, but he's been with the firm for nearly 43 years.

Ask him how to keep the mint from overtaking your vegetable garden and he'll tell you - plant it in a pot. You can test his knowledge with tougher questions and he's sure not to disappoint you, having been an avid gardener from boyhood, just like his dad.

"Back then, all boys were expected to help out in the garden. It was part of the ritual of growing up," the white haired gent explained.

Historic map ready for April unveiling

When George Tremain printed several hundred copies of his map of Halton County in 1858, perhaps he would have been the last person to expect one of them to be hung in the library of his home town, more than 130 years later.

But he would have been surprised. Next month, the Georgetown library, in conjunction with the Essex Historical Society, will be formally unveiling one of six remaining maps in the area after an extensive restoration process costing \$1,700.

The Tremain map, which measures about 20 square feet, was donated to the Georgetown Library by Halton Hills resident Marion Young in 1983. Mrs. Young acquired the map from the family of Dr. Allen McCullough after his death 30 years ago. Dr. McCullough probably acquired the map directly from the printer, George Tremain, in 1858.

At 63 acres, the Dominion Seed House property is much more than the usual backyard gardener has to contend with. Once surrounded by farmland, the Georgetown property is now surrounded by single family homes, strip plazas and industry.

Mr. Peck says the land is part of the old Bradley homestead which included Cedarvale Park, and extended all the way back to the Georgetown GO station parking lot.

William Bradley started the mail order business in the late 1920s, putting out the first catalogue in 1928. Two years later, it was digest size, Mr. Peck said.

Originally a bank clerk, then a vacuum cleaner and barber clippers salesman, Mr. Bradley began selling seeds when his other sales were slow. Soon the seed business was booming, and the electrical business was dropped.

Today, Dominion Seed House is still a family business, run by the daughter of William Bradley, Margaret Harding. Many of the current employees have been with the firm a long time, even those who only work part-time.

"Some of our part-time employees

have been with us 25 years. It speaks highly for the organization. We try to make it family like. Everybody knows everybody," Mr. Peck said.

Dominion Seed House has 23 full-time employees and another 70 part-timers during peak season which starts the third week of January and runs 'til March end.

Pretty well all of the company's business is done through the mail, although in the early days there used to be a small sales station on the two-lane Guelph Street where peony, iris, lily and gladiolus blooms used to be sold to passersby.

The two main buildings in which seeds are stored and sorted, and orders filled and packaged for mailing, were built in the early 1930s, during the Depression. You can see the distinctive black and white buildings from Maple and Guelph Streets.

This is the firm's 60th anniversary and many changes have taken place over the years. The most noteworthy

is that hybrids had been developed for vegetables, petunias, impatiens and other flowers. At the same time, some of the seeds still popular with gardeners go back farther than 1928.

Mr. Peck pointed to Golden Ban-

dam Corn. Grandpa always grew it, so people still want it, although there are better varieties now available, he said.

"We contract all over the world for seeds. We don't grow any here, except for rhubarb," the general manager said. Seeds come from American and European producers.

The Georgetown property is used for the propagation of peonies, iris, day lilies, rhubarb and horse radish, Mr. Peck explained. As well, gladiolus, dahlias and lilies are grown in case there's a shortage of bulbs to meet the demand.

"That's what you see blooming," he said.

To grow the seeds here in Georgetown isn't practical. For one thing, the climate isn't right. A longer growing season is needed, Mr. Peck said. As well, the property isn't large enough.

Many of the flower seeds and some of the vegetable seeds come from California. Idaho supplies the seeds for beans, peas and corn, and Japan many of the hybrids broccoli, cabbage and some flower seeds. There are flower and vegetable seeds from Holland and West Germany, and those for odd flowers from from Africa and India.

Seed House color catalogue a key to the firm's success

Ever since the mail strike of 1972, the Dominion Seed House has gotten out of selling rose bushes.

"We decided to get out at that point," General Manager Doug Peck said. "We were fairly lucky that we were able to hold them (rose bush orders) and they didn't go in the mail."

With nearly all of their business done through the mail, it can be crucial if living things are caught in a mail strike.

The Seed House's 88-page full-color catalogue features all manner of vegetable, flower and grass seeds, plus bulbs and garden accessories - but you won't find the sensitive rose bushes.

In their busy, after-Christmas season, the company gets hundreds of orders filled and ready for delivery. A back room is full of huge wire baskets full of these parcels ready to go out.

"We have a good working rapport with the post master here - an excellent relationship with Mr. King

and his staff," Mr. Peck said.

Daily, the mail truck comes over to pick up the sorted Seed House parcels and takes them directly to the gateway terminal.

"It's just as easy for us to pre-sort them here as send them down there (Georgetown post office)," he said. "We can get parcel delivery to Vancouver in seven or eight days, which is super."

Dominion Seed House customers are coast to coast, from Newfoundland to Vancouver, and even as far north as the Yukon, the general manager said. The company doesn't export, because of all the red tape involved.

Mr. Peck said vegetable and flower seeds are equally popular with customers.

"It's the type of business that when the economy is tight, people buy vegetable seeds. When money is freer, people buy flower seeds and garden related products. It swings with the economy," he said.

Although Mr. Peck says they have

no problem with birds and pests on the company's Georgetown property, they do have a problem with jack rabbits. Experiments with various vegetable seeds, especially corn squash and beans attract the hungry four-legged animals.

Tomatoes are still the best sellers, then beans, carrots and lettuce, Mr. Peck said.

Along with the annual seed catalogue, the company puts out an annual fall bulb brochure for tulips, daffodils, and other bulbous flowers.

What's the most expensive item in the Seed House catalogue this spring? It's the new ivy leaved geranium. It's selling at \$3.25 for eight seeds. That's because there was a lot of intensive breeding involved, Mr. Peck explained.

Anybody can plant a garden, he encourages. You don't need a green thumb for most seeds. He says May 24 is still the rule of thumb for when to plant. When the ground is warmer, you get faster germination and faster growth, Mr. Peck said.