

Crucial advice for entrepreneurs

Successful Acton businessman helps make dream a reality

Recognize and act on opportunities, build a team, and be hands-on financially - that's the main advice offered by Acton native Fred Dawkins in *Everyday Entrepreneur: Making it Happen*, the first of a three-book publishing deal from Dundurn Press.

Dawkins, perhaps best known locally as a co-founder of the Olde Hide House, had successful careers as a leather manufacturer and subdivision developer before stumbling into writing, first with a novel, that Dundurn Press asked him to put on hold while he developed a non-fiction work.

"At one meeting with Dundurn they asked me a lot of questions about my background and suggested I write something about my business career," Dawkins said on Mon-

day, agreeing that he was an entrepreneur before the word was in vogue. With a Bachelor of Commerce and a Masters in Economics, Dawkins describes himself as a "student of life."

Contemplating

Dundurn's offer on a drive to his cottage, Dawkins decided to write about entrepreneurship, along the lines of *The Wealthy Barber*. "When I set down to write it, it was 40 years of research and (took) about a month to write," Dawkins said, adding he called on his rich history of business for the book that features dialogue with three fictional characters who offer street-smart business advice.

"For the first 20 years of my career I was in manufacturing - coating leathers - and Frank Heller and Co. grew from six

employees to 250 with \$20-million in sales, but we hit the wall in 1987-88 and decided to get out."

Next came development of the Olde Hide House with other family members - a venture that put Acton on the tourism map with ambitious marketing campaigns that spawned the still-heard phrase - *It's Worth the Drive to Acton*. Dawkins then branched



Fred Dawkins

out into housing, developing the first phase of the West Meadows subdivision, and then the Acton East subdivision on the south side of Highway 7.

After producing the 180-page book, Dundurn then told Dawkins to go out and get endorsements to help market it. He approached a Professor of Entrepreneurship at the Rotman School of Management at the U of

Toronto. "He grilled me for about three weeks about what I had done and what I had accomplished, and I guess I passed because he agreed to read it and then gave me a great endorsement, and invited me to become a member of the Creative Destruction Lab at U of T.," Dawkins said.

"It has really mushroomed. In January, I'll speak in four sessions to MBA students about my book, and I got a great review today in the National Post," Dawkins said, still somewhat awed at how things have developed. He has already written the second contracted book, and while there's "no money in it, but beyond that it's a lot of fun."

"It is sort of like a little bit of vindication of your career - it's more of a recognition than the money and it's nice to get the recognition - I keep pinching myself because I wouldn't have thought this was possible," Dawkins said, adding one of the greatest job skills today is to be able to create and manage your own career.

In an ever changing work world, Dawkins said his career straddled the old ways and the new. "When we were building the manufacturing pro-

cess, it was a time where you developed a career and stayed with it for the rest of your life. Then, like a lot of others, I had to recreate myself - it's scary, but it seems to be a reality," Dawkins said.

To succeed as an entrepreneur, Dawkins said you must continually be on the look out for opportunities; you must be determined, flexible, resilient and adaptable.

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