

Taking time for sports

Acton's Time Out Sports provides the best gear – close to home

BY DEBORAH QUAILE
THE COMPASS

It was simple, really. Acton didn't have a sports shop, and neither was there one in close proximity to serve enthusiasts' needs. However, the best business ideas are those that fill a void, and that's what Brian and Una Lalande decided to do.

The husband and wife team opened Time Out Sports approximately three months ago, right on the main street of Acton, just east of the downtown core where there is ample parking. In their 750 square feet of space, they provide sporting goods for the most popular team and individual sports.

"We've lived in Acton for 13 years," Una Lalande states. "We used to live in Scarborough. My husband and I were looking for a house because we didn't want to raise our son, Jay, in the city. The real estate led us here."

The Lalandes have two children – Jay, who is now 13, and younger sister Monique, 8 – both of whom attend school in Acton.

"Acton is a tighter community. Living in the city, it's such a fast-paced lifestyle. People are in such a hurry. It's much more relaxed here, you get to know the people in town. It's so much nicer. Everybody's supportive."

Brian's parents ran their own business so he knows customer service is the key to any successful business. He started his own company, BPL Renovations, in 1987, through which he does renovations and home improvements. But after tossing the idea of a sporting

goods store in the back of their minds for a couple of years, the Lalandes decided to make their dreams a reality.

"Both kids are involved in sports, and we know a lot of people in town whose families are as well. We always had to go out of town to get things, as did everybody else. So we thought, why not provide that service?"

Una, who used to bake before she had Jay, stayed home for several years to raise the children, filling in with part time work when something became available. She now does the bulk of the work at Time Out, although Jay and Brian, as well as part time assistants are vital components. "You need someone with that sports knowledge to serve customers properly."

"The store is starting slowly – it's all hockey equipment right now, and figure skating. We have new and used skates – not everyone can afford new skates all the time – lots of equipment, Mondor skating tights, as well as catalogues to order in dresses. Brian does expert skate sharpening, having taken a course and invested in a special machine to precisely renew each blade."

"Business is really growing and Time Out has been able to please its hockey customers. In the spring we intend to have baseball, soccer, swimsuits and goggles... We're planning on bringing in some golf equipment. Lacrosse is also gaining popularity and it's a demand we definitely want to fulfill."

Another exciting aspect of the business is the corporate and team wear that customers can special order. The Lalandes can set up screening, embroidery and twill work with suppliers off site to provide ball caps, golf shirts, fleece, T-shirts, 3-in-1 jackets, wind suits, headbands, turtle-necks and more. Company colours, logos and names can all be worked onto the clothing at the customer's request. There are many styles and brands for each item, detailed in catalogues for easy reference. The corporate wear is also great, Una comments, for unique employee gifts.

"We're also an authorized CCM replica dealer and we've been doing quite well with those products."

Not only do they have the most popular sports, but a few of the "smaller" ones – such as dart boards, ping pong balls and paddles, volleyball and soccer shinpads. There are carry-alls for storing gear, and a change room in which to try on equipment – a necessity for checking the proper fit.

"People have been supportive of our business, dropping in to visit or just see what we have. Word is spreading and they're phoning for more goods. The response for jerseys over Christmas, for example, has been incredible. "We're straightforward – if we can find the product we will get it for you."

As well as providing a valuable service to the sporting community, the Lalandes also support a Novice house league hockey team. "The funding helps the organization. It's a good cause," Una states.

Lalande likes the fact that their family business, although

making mealtimes and days off tricky to manage, is strengthening family values.

"Jay works at the store and is getting that experience and a sense of responsibility. He likes it, and is impressed that he gets paid for helping!" she grins.

Time Out finds out what the customers' needs are and do their best to serve those requirements. "If there's a big enough demand, we'll do our

best to fill it. We had people waiting up to the last day before we opened to get things they needed. They were very patient and we appreciate that. Overall, I want to provide a service that I would expect when I go shopping. I treat my customers the same way."

The Lalandes' dedication to their business makes it worth taking time out to visit Acton's new sporting goods store.



PHOTO BY DEBORAH QUAILE

TIME OUT FOR FAMILY - Brian and Una Lalande believe Time Out Sports should provide the same quality service that they would expect from a retailer. They like to keep on top of what their customers' requirements are and do their best to fulfill them.

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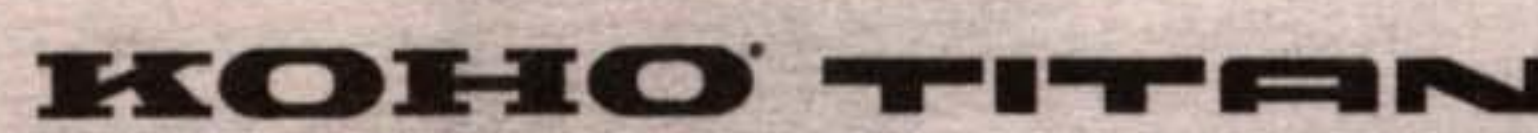
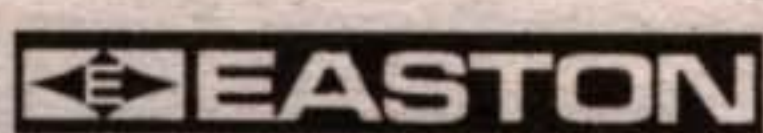
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