

The best "parts" yet to come

Ralph MacDonald Appliance Service grows in new directions

BY DEBORAH QUAILE
THE COMPASS

After 31 years in the business, Ralph MacDonald can look at what his business is evolving into and be very proud.

The MacDonald family farmed in Wellington County with dairy cattle.

"I worked for a couple of years driving a cement truck during school, and then got a job with Northern Telecom for a year and a half before starting the business. I was away from home a lot but took a correspondence course in appliance servicing. I wanted to do something to stay at home."

Working with appliances came quite naturally, because, as Ralph says, "When you grow up around a farm, you like to fix things."

Ralph and his wife Janet still live on the family farm in Eden Mills, although in a new house. Since 1969, Ralph MacDonald Appliance Service grew substantially. In 1981, he hired one employee, and by 1987 had eight.

Unfortunately, Ralph was forced to cut back for health reasons and let the staff go. He gave up his volunteer work and realized that he had to search for a new direction.

Thanks to family ties, son-in-law Matthew Clark and daughter Heather are now running the show.

Matt was a paramedic and is Commanding Officer of the Sea Cadet Corps. in Kitchener. Originally from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Matt met Heather in Peterborough at the Cadet Corp. as they both became officers. They and their two young children, Amy, five, and Andrew, nearly two, now live in Guelph.

Over the past few years, Matt has also worked with Rockwood minor baseball and

counseled young offenders, but he has had to give up some volunteer work while rebuilding Ralph MacDonald Appliance Service.

Matt studied business courses after the changeover was made, although Ralph is still key in the business. It was Matt's idea to branch out into new directions and incorporate a parts facility. Ralph MacDonald Appliance Service also sells water softeners and does central air and furnace replacement installations.

The company has four employees along with Heather, Matt and Ralph. Their present retail outlet on Victoria Road near York opened on Labour Day weekend of '99.

"We continue to service Rockwood, Acton, Erin, Milton... three or four days a week are spent in those towns. But we hope to be in a new larger spot at the front of this mall by fall. It's a prime location with better exposure and has three times the space we have here. Business is great and continues to grow - up to three or four times what we were doing before," Matt says.

The retail store proved itself to be a worthwhile venture but the time has come for a clearly delineated showroom for good used appliances. As it is now, they receive about 10 or so phone calls a day regarding used equipment. There will be room for offices, a boardroom/training facility, and a second floor above the office space for a wide selection of parts.

"We'll expand up front with a separate area for heating and air conditioning, a water treatment showroom area, and will include many more refurbished small appliances and parts.

We're also updating our software program to help run things, which was designed for this type of business. With that, we can schedule trucks, set up wholesale and retail pricing, track inventory... It will be a great step."

Ralph MacDonald Appliance Service stocks a huge variety of parts for almost every need: central vacuums, spa and hot tub parts, stove burners and elements or agitators for washing machines. Walls and shelves are lined with coils of copper pipe, water filters, dials, knobs, paints, cleaners, water filters and even smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

"We don't generally sell new appliances," Matt comments, but they can research prices. "This comes down to a trust factor, and we don't want to abuse that. We don't want to tell people that their old machine is no good and then try to sell them a new one."

Ralph MacDonald Appliance Service Limited handles repairs to all makes and models of residential appliances. They are certified in natural gas and propane as well.

In the future, Matt sees the company splitting into three separate divisions - mechanical/service, retail parts and the showroom.

"I would like one or two more employees by the

end of the year. It takes time to train and it's a learning process for our business. I see the company endeavouring to improve our already stringent customer service and developing a comprehensive customer service plan. For example, one week after we make a service call, we want to make a follow-up call to see how the customer is doing. We'll also implement a no-fee estimate service. Although it's costly in the beginning, in the long run it builds customer service."

As if that weren't enough, Matt Clark is running for Guelph City Council this autumn.

"I've been tied to community service for many years, as a volunteer probation officer, with the Sea Cadets, and so on. When you have those skills and are involved in the community, it's a natural step. I believe in community service, just like in the business. Just like the folks in Nova Scotia, we still believe in shaking people's hands and helping out. And the Canadian Forces have certainly taught me about teamwork."

Ralph MacDonald Appliance Service Limited is located at 230 Victoria Road South in Guelph. Call 519-856-9958 or 519-829-2193.



PHOTOS BY DEBORAH QUAILE

Key parts of the business: The helpful faces you see each day (from left to right) are Ralph MacDonald, Scott, Brenda, Asoka and owner Matt Clark.

Appliance Parts and Service

WE HAVE IT ALL UNDER ONE ROOF!

Appliance Service

Service to all makes and models of appliances

Certified in • Natural Gas • Propane • Refrigeration

856-9958

829-2193

Appliance Parts Depot

- Factory Authorized Replacement Appliance Parts
- Home Comfort Systems
- Water Softeners and Drinking Water Systems
- Small Appliance Service Centre

829-2194

Fax: 829-2195



RALPH MacDonald

Appliance Service LTD.

519-856-9958/

519-829-2193

Appliance Parts Depot

519-829-2194

230 Victoria Rd. South, Guelph

Serving our Community since 1969