



It's Your Business

with **JANE MULLER**

Turning old skates into a business

Rob McPhail calls himself a "skate broker". Like a car salesperson, he takes trade-ins. The only difference is that instead of a car lot, these used models line the shelves of a skate exchange.

Milton Pro Sport and Skate Exchange Inc. has about 4,000 pairs of used skates between the Milton store and the original family store in Newmarket. Rob's grandfather Bill Koshel began in 1936 with a shoe repair business in a town of 3,000. A demand for skate repairs expanded into a skate exchange and "something to keep him busy in the winter," Rob says.

Rob worked at the Newmarket exchange on weekends from the time he was eight years old. He opened Milton Skate Exchange in 1984 at age 18. He was drawn to this area by race horses and ended up making riding boots. The skate exchange began as a hobby.

Two years ago his grandfather died at age 77 and Rob took over the family business. Unlike his grandfather, Rob says he started early in business so he could retire early.

A year ago he moved the skate exchange from what amounted to a hole in the wall shop that flooded each spring to a modern retail outlet. The used skates sit discreetly on shelves at the far end of the store. More prominent are the shining blades of new Bauers and CCMs. Hockey pads, sticks and helmets, rows of baseball bats, gloves and hats, lacrosse sticks, tennis balls and footballs flank the skates.

Rob says his experience in the business and his own activity in sports allows him to sell "proper fitting skates". The stock includes high end equipment and low end as well. He "shoots" for merchandise that a department store won't carry.

"Parents can outfit their kids in better quality used equipment for the same price as low quality new equipment," Rob explained.

A pair of Bauer 2000 hockey skates that retail for \$300 sell for just \$100 used, according to the skate broker.

Rob divides his time between the two stores. Two months ago he took on a partner. Miltonian Paul Henderson, who was once a regular customer, is now a "working partner". Customers like to know they're "dealing with the boss" and that's what the partnership has allowed.

Under his grandfather's tutelage, Rob learned that "service is first."

"People would rather pay an extra dollar for good service."

One of those services is skate sharpening, something Rob admits is an art. On a regular Saturday, he'll sharpen up to 200 pairs, so it's a good idea to make an appointment. His background in working with leather is also put to use at the store, repairing baseball gloves and skates.

The shop is located at 400 Main St. behind Harvey's. Customers who look for Rob at the former 300 Main St. address are directed to the new and improved premises by the operator of the taxi company located there now.

Rob's banking on an up and coming sport — roller blading — to catch on. He's selling the street skates with wheels along the blade for \$100 a pair. These are low-end models, but of course they can be exchanged for upscale models that will go for \$300.

Milton's a "hotbed" for these street skates, says Rob. He's planning to expand the market next season by starting a roller blade league in town. Skate exchange customers could be trading in their blades for a new set of wheels this time next year.

Warmer welcome keeps Manor residents healthy

A permanent 'welcomer' is now on hand to ensure a smooth transition for new residents to Halton Centennial Manor.

Staff became aware sometime ago that an increasing number of people were having difficulty adjusting to their new living arrangements.

Cultural shock

Halton's social services commissioner Bonnie Ewart said new residents, after living in their own home for decades, can face a kind of "cultural shock" when suddenly thrust into a new living arrangement.

A six-month trial program was instituted with the goal of helping residents make a better adjustment and thus improve health.

And it's worked: Ms. Ewart told Monday's health and social services committee meeting that the number of residents requiring entry into greater levels of care has greatly decreased.

"Based on observation and evaluation, as well as the positive feedback received, the 'resident support worker' has been developed into a permanent position," she said.

"Staff coverage has been increased to seven days a week and support on admission day is provided

for a minimum of 12 hours.

She added that the service is also available to residents awaiting internal transfer.

Link maintained

A new program, also run by the support worker, she said ensures that a link is maintained between the manor and any of its residents who may be hospitalized.

The resident support worker also leads a support group which addresses the needs of families and friends providing elderly care in the community.

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