

SALUTE TO SMALL BUSINESS

WALKING

TALL





Photo credit: Jenn Gregory Photography

Her designs are sold primarily at her Bishop's Landing store in downtown Halifax and by all accounts, Turbine is doing very well.

Drader-Murphy is even experimenting with new business ideas, including travelling "trunk shows" and private events, where the clothes go to the people. "We're still in the development phase, but so far it seems very promising," she says. "It's easier to find good people who are a fit with our product, than it is to find a good location, so we're focusing on people and not bricks and mortar."

—Cathi Stevenson

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DESIGNING WOMAN

It wasn't quite an unpaid internship, but sweeping scraps of fabric off the cutting room floor wasn't what Lisa Drader-Murphy had in mind after graduating from Form & Function Design Academy in Calgary in 1990. Her strong work ethic paid off though, and soon she was designing.

Then, in 1997 the single mom found a stock of vintage tailoring wool in her employer's warehouse. That discovery led to months of designing, pattern development, production and eventually to Turbine: Power Clothes for Women, Drader-Murphy's first store in downtown Calgary.

In spite of never receiving government grants, she opened a second store and her success was soon being written about in magazines. It also earned her a spot on Western Living's 1998 Top Designer List and opened the door for a job as design expert on the TV show, Style for Men.

After remarrying and having a second child, Drader-Murphy was about to open her third store when she discovered her toddler was speaking German like the nanny, before learning English. It wasn't long after that the family moved to Falmouth, Nova Scotia, where Drader-Murphy could take the time to focus on her children.

It's from that serene location that the company's production now takes place.

SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

Want to know what Atlantic Canadians really like? Ask a New Yorker. Better yet, hire an expert from Toronto, or maybe find someone in Argentina who has never been to Canada, but will work cheaply.

This seems to be the philosophy of some local businesses hiring freelancers and consultants to fill contract positions, and it leaves highly skilled professionals living here, and probably patronizing those businesses, ignored. Hardly seems like a good way to connect with your client base.

It's an issue Laurie Dolhan is addressing. Her online company, ContractMe.ca, matches job seekers with companies that need their services. Businesses looking for experts can search the online database or post a job and connect with local people who have a real understanding of the area and the people who live in it.

“There’s no need for a company to bring in outside consultants, we’ve got serious talent right here,” says Dolhan

who has a background in marketing, and runs ContractMe.ca out of her Ketch Harbour home – or wherever she (the lone employee) and her laptop happen to be.

Hiring people from outside the area is not the only problem she sees. If a business owner is not focusing on their core business, then he or she is probably wasting time and money. It would be better to contract that work outside the company and concentrate on growing the business and expanding the client base, she explains.

Dolhan started ContractMe.ca after her family lost all of its possessions in a fire. The fire happened while Dolhan, her husband and young son were moving from the Yukon to Nova Scotia so her husband could start a new career. The adventure took a serious turn when they discovered smoke coming from the trailer that contained their belongings. Live ammunition and propane canisters were exploding because of the heat, so there was little the firefighters could do except



Photo credit: Halifax Headshots Photography

close down the highway and wait for the fire to burn out.

Aside from a few items they had in their vehicle, everything was lost except for her son’s baby album, which a fireman found inside a cooler. That, and the courage for Dolhan to follow through on her entrepreneurial dream. —Cathi Stevenson

FRESH FOOD FAST

Anyone who has dragged groceries home in a cart or on a bus will appreciate the importance of having a supermarket nearby. But this is 2013. Why settle for merely close when people can order groceries from the convenience of their own homes – in bed if they choose, via computer, cell phone or any device with Internet access? Imagine fruits and vegetables, prime cuts of meat and baked goods, all locally produced, all fresh, even organic, delivered right to your door.

That is what MyMaritimeMarket.ca – a website that lists food products from the more than 250 farmers who sell at the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market – is offering, says co-founder and director Mandhir Singh. With an expected start date of mid-August 2013, the new service will be available first in Halifax and Amherst, and expand from there.

Since many of the farmers' booths at Seaport market are open only a few days a week and getting downtown during these hours can be difficult, shopping

online for local food makes sense. The virtual supermarket will also accept most types of credit and bank cards, something many vendors at Seaport can't do.

The online market serves other important functions, explains Singh, a Saint Mary's University MBA student, who has done extensive research for the project. One of the most important roles of MyMaritimeMarket.ca is that it will cut down on food waste. "Twenty-five per cent of what farmers produce is wasted," he says. "Some of that unsold product is used by production and manufacturing companies, but much of it is just thrown out."

Other services in the area offer fresh, local products, but don't offer choices. Food items are shipped according to availability, but with MyMaritimeMarket.ca, customers will be able to choose exactly what they want, says Singh.

It's not just consumers they're seeking to reach. Many institutions that have cafeterias and prepare food for residents

will be able to use MyMaritimeMarket.ca and ensure they're serving the freshest available food from local producers.

—Cathi Stevenson



Photo supplied by Mandhir Singh

COURT IS IN SESSION

There are probably many people who would love a basketball court in their backyard, and some might actually build one, right after they get to that next level on Candy Crush. But, Joe Mosher of Halifax actually built one and now, just a few steps from his house, he's using it to help bring the dreams of young athletes closer to reality.

Mosher, a well-known name in local basketball circles, credits the game with more than just keeping him in shape. As a teenager in the '90s, an injury ended his own aspirations of playing basketball on a more advanced level. Soon his marks dropped and his increasingly poor behaviour ended with him being expelled from high school. He eventually went back, but things really started to turn around when he agreed to help coach younger players. Almost immediately, his grade average shot up and he went on to university, eventually becoming an elementary school teacher.

Coaching basketball has remained a focus in his life, and every day he's looking for new ways to share the sport with young people in Nova Scotia. He says the biggest challenge

has been the cost of court rentals. When he started his own coaching program, Work Basketball - Skills Training, about five years ago, he was losing money just renting space, so last year he decided to borrow money and build his own court. It was a business risk that has paid off. Since then, Mosher has been able to train more athletes, and business is booming. It's a full-time summer job, he says.

Mosher offers his players "a lot of individual help," regardless of skill level, and while his youngest student so far was only four years old and not quite ready to turn pro, he can include two NCAA players, and dozens of other college players, both male and female, amongst those he's coached.

Mosher is sensitive to the cost of programs and offers individual training for \$20 an hour. Every August he runs Joe's Camp, a non-profit, invitational bantam elite basketball camp that costs only \$40, and includes lunch, a t-shirt and a basketball. Participants receive instruction from some of the province's top coaches and players.

—Cathi Stevenson



Photos supplied by Joe Mosher

DARK (AND MILKY) PASSIONS

It's not always easy being chief chocolate officer but Brent Smith has proven he's the right man for the job.

Five years ago he was working in the charitable sector and making chocolate in his basement as a hobby. By 2009, he'd perfected his all-natural artisan recipes, quit his day job and began working full-time as a chocolatier. Not that there weren't some raised eyebrows and naysayers when he announced his plans, but he didn't let that stop him.

Things went so well that by the end of 2010, Smith, along with his wife, Christina Dove, were opening the Newfoundland Chocolate Company on Duckworth Street in St. John's. It's the only store in Newfoundland, possibly all of Atlantic Canada, where chocolate drips from the ceiling and shoppers are transported to an ethereal world where the rich aromas of delicious *...sweet creamy chocolate invade your body like slow burning embers, passionately awakening your senses, inhabiting your soul...* um, sorry, the chocoholic in me digresses. He now has a staff of 20 to 25

people – 30 during the Christmas season, to help meet demand.

One of the most appealing features of Smith's chocolate is that every aspect of the process is done by hand and many ingredients are local to Newfoundland and Labrador, including the wild berries he uses.

The Newfoundland Chocolate Company imports Belgian, Swiss and French gourmet couverture chocolate made from the best cocoa beans available and Smith strives to find complementary blends of chocolate with natural ingredients. Since everything is done manually, each piece of chocolate in every box is unique, like a small piece of mouth-watering art.

Smith prefers to do things the old fashioned way, instead of attempting to make things move faster through technology and he thinks that is something small business owners and entrepreneurs should keep in mind. People seem to embrace technology, only to discover that automation wasn't worth the investment or is simply complicating the process, he says. —*Cathi Stevenson*



Photos supplied by Newfoundland Chocolate Company

