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Email: editor@exchangemagazine.com

Publisher: Jon Rohr
jon.rohr@exchangemagazine.com

Editor: Paul Knowles
paul.knowles@exchangemagazine.com

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Kevin Tupman Photography
Declan Rohr

Contributors:
Paul Knowles, Jon Rohr, Nancy Silcox

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"WE'RE NOT DEAD YET!"

Local independent bookstores bucking the trend

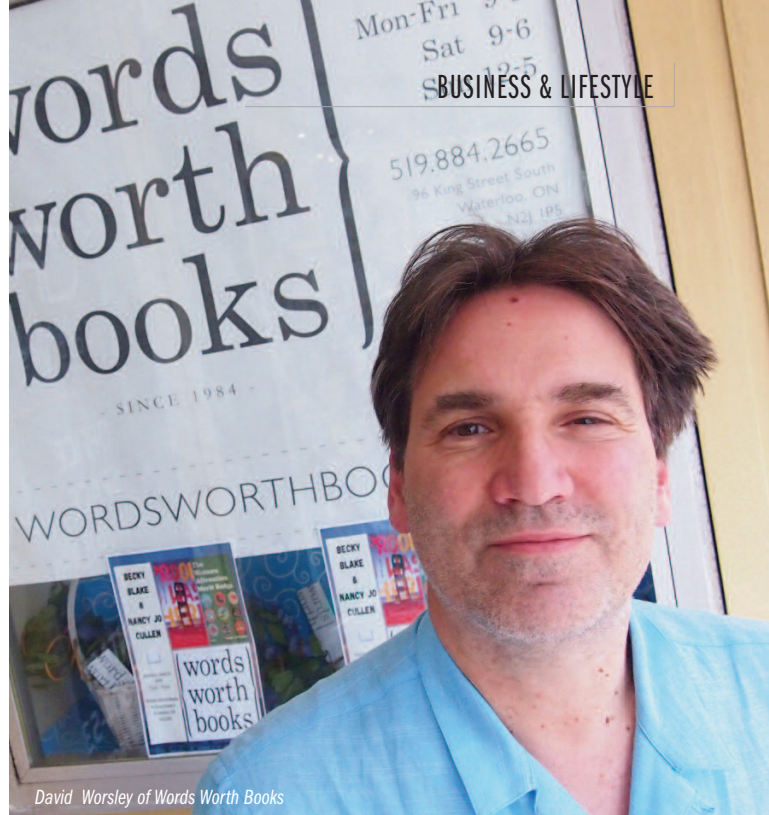
BY NANCY SILCOX

In a market where on-line book buying continues to flourish, independent bookstores and their loyal customers across Canada are asking: "Is the era of the 'indie' drawing to a close?" Are we seeing the extinction of an independent business model? The 2014 closure of Toronto's iconic The World's Biggest Bookstore, then, hot on its heels, the "going out of business" sign on the door of six other long-time Toronto 'indies' brought the cri-

The Bookshelf of Guelph, which opened its doors in 1973, touts diversification as the key to survival.

sis to a head. Was the hometown bookseller about to become an endangered species?

Findings published in The Book Retail Sector in Canada validate the worry. From the bookstore on every main street model of the 1970's, statistics show that there are less than 2000 independent bookstores operating across Canada today. Information pulled from a recent informal survey of over 200 Waterloo-Wellington readers seem to back up the bad news. Overwhelmingly, by a score of 3 to 1, survey takers stated that Amazon, followed by Chapters/Indigo, is the choice when it comes to shelling



David Worsley of Words Worth Books

out bucks for books. Trips to the local independent bookstore come in a distant third.

But three area independent bookstores – The Bookshelf in Guelph, the Book Express in Cambridge and Words Worth Books in Waterloo – are battling the tide, gamely piping up "not yet."

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Stephanie Vanstone, Ben Minnett and Barb Minnett of The Bookshelf

Each store offers Waterloo and Wellington-area bibliophiles a tempting menu of friendly, personal service, knowledgeable recommendations and the pleasure of feeling a good book in the hand. With a combined 112 years in business, these booksellers have braved the rolling tides of change: from the birth and growth of big-box Chapters/Indigo bookstores in the 1990's; to the introduction of e-reader Kindle in 2007 and rival Kobo in 2010; to the voracious appetite of today's largest seller of "stuff," Amazon. This trio are pulling out all stops to grasp their share of the market.

A family of booksellers

The Bookshelf of Guelph, which opened its doors in 1973, touts diversification as the key to survival. In 1980, founders Barb and Doug Minnett added a café to their bookstore, and the Bookshelf became the Bookshelf Café. It was Canada's first combo bookstore and restaurant. Ironically, Guelph native Michael Tamblyn, CEO of Kobo, worked as a dishwasher at the Bookshelf Café in his high school years. A second floor cinema followed in 1989 and 10 years later came the Bookshelf's e-Bar, where entertainment, topical discussion and celebration mix with book selling. Barb Minnett suggests that they remain the world's only bookstore/cinema/bar. Barb and Doug's children, Ben and Hannah Minnett, along with Ben's wife Stephanie and Mike Vanstone are the Bookshelf's current co-owners. Ben, a self-described "pull it all together guy," offers a three-pronged recipe for survival in today's rapidly-evolving book market. "Be creative, be nimble and be good at executing new ideas."

One new idea, and a popular one at

that, has been hatched to counter Amazon's "buy-it-today-get-it-tomorrow" delivery service. "For phone or website orders, as long as we have the book in stock, we can guarantee delivery to customers in Guelph within an hour or two," says Ben.

Keeping abreast of current social issues and linking them to just-published books also ranks high on the Bookshelf's marketing strategies. Between 70 and 100 events book space at the popular e-Bar each year. They range from topical discussions and poetry readings to art and music presentations. And of course, the bookstore below is open to serve attendees during this time.

Controversy about services for autistic children has proved serendipitous to both the Bookshelf and to author Michael McCreary, author of 'Funny You Don't look Autistic'.

The Bookshelf jumped on the current brou-ha-ha to invite author McCreary to a Bookshelf e-Bar event. Copies of McCreary's book, autographed, were available to purchase.

Another recent e-Bar event, focussing on the topic of 21st century masculinity brought out a crowd to hear authors Daemon Fairless, reading from

his book 'Mad Blood Stirring' and Rachael Giese with her recent 'Boys: What it Means to be a Man'. It was good publicity for the authors, great news for Bookshelf sales.

"After all ... hope is not a business plan."

- David Worsley: WordsWorth Books

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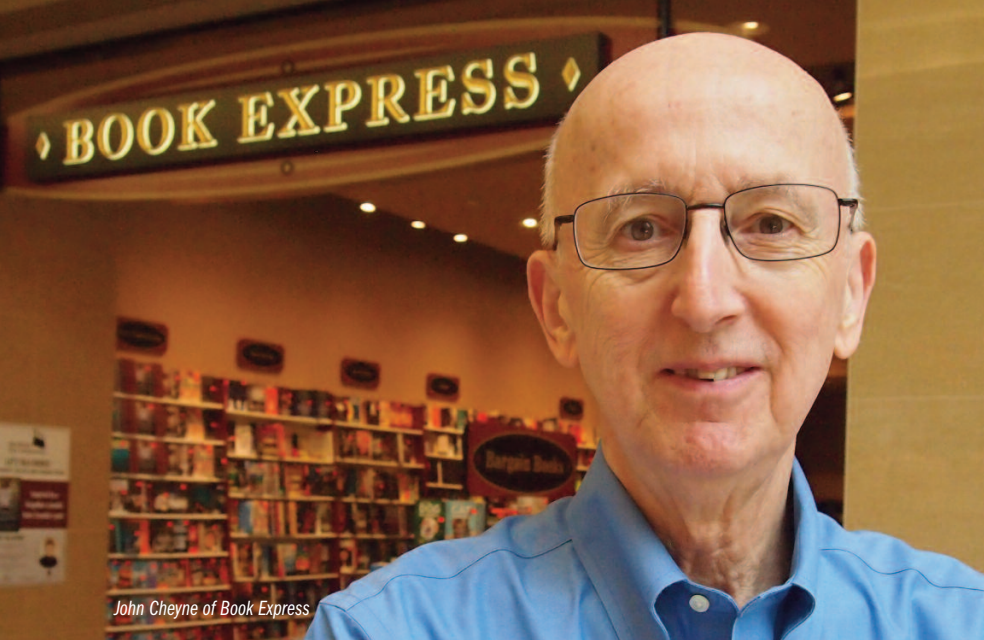
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John Cheyne of Book Express

Cambridge couple concerned

With the December 2018 closing of Kitchener's Gateway Park Chapters and its re-invention as two Indigo Books & Music stores, one on Fairway Road, Kitchener and the other on Hespeler Road in Cambridge, John Cheyne's and Anne Laird's Book Express at the Cambridge Centre Mall saw a dip of 20% in book sales. While that number has stabilized, the couple remains concerned for the future for their store, open since 1986. It's a big change "from having an independent bookstore in pretty well every town in Canada 30 years ago," Cheyne notes. "And while the freefall since the multiple Toronto closures in 2014 has slowed, attrition has continued." The loss goes further than empty commercial space. Closed businesses mean a loss of taxes being paid to municipalities points out Cheyne. "And remember... Amazon pays no local taxes which support our essential services such as fire and police services." Cheyne predicts property taxes for both households and businesses will go up as on-line marketers like Amazon grow. "The shortfall has to come from someplace," he warns.

In his attractive and brightly-lit space of over 1800 square feet, holding more than 20,000 titles, spirited and imaginative book-selling stems the tide, says Cheyne. One of the best marketing tools is local author events. A recent Book Express gathering brought together five local authors: non-fiction writer Bob Burt; fantasy writers Richard H. Stephens and Daryl Ball; children's writer Lynda McKay and young adult writer Sherry LeClerc. A number of book buyers arrived too. Cheyne calls such events "good for the authors – all from the Cambridge area – and valuable exposure for their books." Self-published books do well at Book Express, says Cheyne, and he's delighted to stock them. Bob Burt's 'rare Moments in Time', which chronicles Cambridge's rare Nature Preserve has been very popular with book buyers. Cambridge crime writer G.S. Marriott's latest novel 'The Devil's Portrait' has sold well, as has novelist and filmmaker Becca Blue's 'The Guardians of the Heart.'

"Progress" can be bad news

And in uptown Waterloo, at Words Worth Books, if competition from Amazon, with a market share estimated to be up to 40% of

all e-book sales isn't challenge enough, there's transportation "progress" threatening scuttle sales. David Worsley, the bookstore's co-owner with Mandy Brouse, likens the life of an independent bookstore owner to trying to catch a dog on the run. "And the dog keeps getting faster and faster."

That speedy pup seemed to be at its fastest with the news that the Region's long-awaited rapid transit system, ION, would start closing streets in 2015. It was scheduled to begin chewing up King Street in front of Words Worth Books by spring 2016. Add that barrier to the already-limited parking spaces for shoppers who choose downtown instead of one of the area malls. The news sent Brouse, Worsley and their staff into survival mode. Worsley gives full credit to

Brouse for preparing them for the battle ahead. "The first thing Mandy did was update our website, as well as our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. She laid it on the line, what we were facing as a business while construction was right outside our door. And she asked the community to help us." Brouse's website updates included a map showing a route to the store when streets were closed and showed customers where to park.

The plan of opening up the store's back door, inviting shoppers to enter that way and avoid the King Street construction chaos was the ingenious plan of Brouse and employee Kristen Hahn.

"We brought in musicians and entertainers to welcome them in the back door; we offered free gifts – you name it," laughs Worsley. They also initiated a delivery service for shoppers who couldn't pluck

up courage to battle the King Street mess.

The loyalty of Words Worth's clients was ignited with word of the impending crisis. "People used us to buy gift cards for friends and relatives; they bought Christmas gifts for teachers; a few offices even took up a collection," says Worsley, with gratitude. "Our community rallied around us and we survived."

Exchange asked independent booksellers what new books were bringing loyal shoppers into their stores. At Words Worth Books it was non-fiction. "Thank God for Michelle Obama," enthuses Worsley, referring to Obama's best-selling 'Becoming'. "We sold 200 copies and could have sold 100 more after they were gone." At the Bookshelf, Canadian Esi Edugan's best-selling novel 'Washington Black' beat out Obama's by a hair in sales. At the Book Express, it was Edugan and Obama again.

And while dollars and cents pay the bills and determine their survival, the emotional pay-off of dealing one on one with customers is just as important say our three local independent book retailers. "Over the past winter, I had three customers tell me they were moving to Guelph because of the Bookshelf," says a delighted Barb Minett. For John Cheyne, selling books for over a quarter of a century indicates he still gets a thrill putting a good book into an appreciative reader's hands. "Grateful" to have survived a challenging two years seems to be the operative feeling for the staff at Words Worth Books. "After all," says David Worsley, "hope is not a business plan."

X



GARMENT STREET: NEW LIFE IN KITCHENER'S CORE

The Momentum Partnership is doing something unique in the heart of the city

BY PAUL KNOWLES

Don Zehr and Brian Prudham

The downtown cores of Kitchener and Waterloo are being transformed. It's easy to say this is because of the now-operational Ion Light Rail Transit service, but perhaps the truth is, it's more because of the vision and commitment of people like Brian Prudham and Don Zehr.

Sure, the Region (and other governmental partners) have put a lot of money and faith into the Ion – but that is taxpayer money; the decision-makers don't actually have “skin in the game”. But Zehr, Prudham, and a significant number of other local developers and builders do have money and reputation on the line – and they are taking the chance in order to do some special things in the heart of the city.

Prudham is part of Momentum Developments; Zehr heads the company that bears his name, the Zehr Group. They have joined forces as the Momentum Partnership to build an innovative district in the heart of Kitchener, a development that will include three residential towers, and a breathtaking office complex that incorporates the heritage building that once housed Huck Gloves.

Overall, the area is known as Garment Street – located on Victoria at Bramm, a couple of short blocks from King. It covers 2.6 acres, and when complete, will include 670 condominium apartments, 140,000 square feet of office space, and retail/restaurant services.

Zehr is really excited about the office building, in which a brand new building will rise beside and above the Huck Glove building, and will include a soaring atrium and many other features and amenities. “It is like no other in this area,” he says. “It's going to be so different.”

Zehr is really excited about the office building, in which a brand new building will rise beside and above the Huck Glove building... “It is like no other in this area,” he says. “It's going to be so different.”

Today, the first tower is finished, and all 171 units are occupied. Shovels are not in the ground for the second residential tower, and the third tower and office complex should be underway in the very near future. The entire project should be done – landscaping and all – by spring of 2022. And then, says Prudham, Garment Street will be lined with people sitting on restaurant patios, enjoying the ambience of this brand new community.

And there is no question there will be people, because between 90 and 95 per cent of all three residential tower units – 670 in all – are already sold.

The Momentum Partnership – a branding title, not a new business – was formed because Momentum Developments, already with a strong history of innovative projects in the region, was looking for a partner in the Garment Street development. Don Zehr joined the cause. And the new partners brought in an important third partner– KingSett Capital, described as “Canada's leading private equity real estate investment firm.”

It's highly significant that KingSett got involved in Garment Street, says Zehr, because this is the first time the Toronto-based firm has invested as a project partner, in Waterloo Region. It's a mark of the Region's growing presence on the national scene – and of the credibility of the Momentum Partnership.

Don Zehr has had an office in downtown Kitchener since the late 1980s, and he has had a front-row seat to the changes, both bad and more recently, good. He recalls that in the late 80s, “downtown Kitchener was rocking.”

His office is currently located in a plaza purchased at that time, and “this plaza was full of national brand tenants.” But then came

the change. “We saw it go from that stage to full-out decline.”

He credits then-Kitchener mayor Carl Zehr (no relation) with taking action to begin to save the city core, first with luring the University of Waterloo to bring the School of Pharmacy to the Victoria and King area. That was followed by the unexpected success of the Kaufman Lofts, and then the redevelopment of The Tannery, which houses Communitech and other high tech enterprises. Don Zehr says, “The Tannery is when you first saw Toronto people taking note of Kitchener.”

It's highly significant that KingSett got involved in Garment Street, says Zehr, because this is the first time the Toronto-based firm has invested as a project partner, in Waterloo Region.

Zehr adds, “You have to give credit to Carl Zehr and city council. That [investing in bringing new institutions and businesses to the city core] wasn't all that popular of an idea, when they set up that fund.” He compares the criticism to what the Region hears about the Ion.

Ironically, perhaps, as Zehr partners with Prudham in Garment Street, Zehr Group has sold their plaza on King to another developer, a package that includes the former Ratz Bechtel funeral home complex.

A close look at the Garment Street project tells us a lot about what's happening in the city cores of Waterloo Region.

One key development is that the city is entirely on side with projects like Garment Street. The focus on infilling and brownfield development have meant that city planners are big fans of such projects.

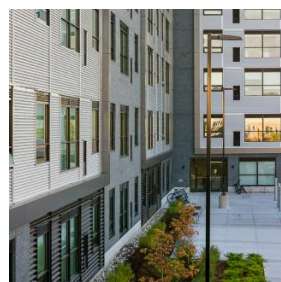
The fact that the Momentum Partnership has made a firm commitment to saving, restoring, and even historically designating the Huck Glove building “really created a mixed-use community, and because of this, the city was very easy to work with.”

Of course, the municipalities are also benefitting from recently reinstated development charges – there was a holiday from such charges, which has ended, with development charges changing from zero to \$20,000 “per door”. Prudham fears that these charges, which could reach levels of \$30,000-\$35,000 “per door” in residential developments, could stall the current boom. He adds that there is another financial challenge on the horizon: “Rising construction costs have started to outpace the retail rate of condos.”

There is perhaps an advantage here, for the Garment Street project, because construction is carried out by another of Don Zehr's entities – Zehr Levesque Inc., an award-winning company.

Another important trend is that the new residents at Garment Street are not people who are moving from elsewhere in the city or the region. These, says Prudham, are “new residents”, people coming to the region because of new jobs at companies like Google. This, adds Zehr, is “so exciting.”

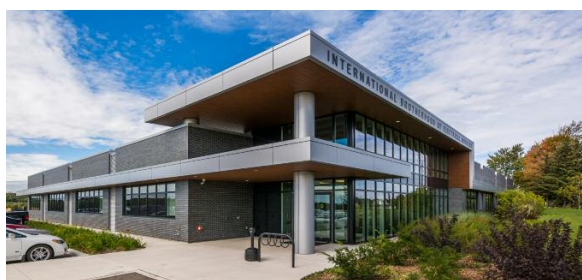
Prudham and Zehr don't believe that the light rail transit system is the only factor – or even the most important one – in what's happening in the city cores, but they do think it is significant. Zehr says, “I feel like it's the bonus.” Prudham adds, “All of a sudden there's this way to connect.”




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Zehr points out “Having a transportation system of this quality, means you move up in stature.” And Prudham admits that the Ion was a significant sales point, and that “we selected our sites based on where the platforms are.”

Both men also believe the coming of all-day, two-way GO trains will be important to the health of the city cores.

This focus on public transit is indeed having an impact on how new developments are configured. Headlines were recently made when one new apartment development in Kitchener – featuring small units – was approved with no parking included. That’s a far cry from only five years ago when .8 parking spaces per unit was a requirement.

Today, says Prudham, demand for parking is on the decline and, in fact, they’re finding they may have planned for too much parking – some residents simply won’t buy. He points to a recent development by Momentum that included .65 spaces for each unit... but in the end, only .5 spaces were required. A lot of people living in the core of the city simply don’t have, or want, cars. Says Prudham, “the demand keeps drying up.”

Instead, he adds, the key is “making sure you’re Uber-ready, with a pick up and drop-off space.”

The project partners understand that the personality of Garment Street may actually change over the years. Today, the residents are from “a younger demographic,” says Prudham, but that “may shift” as retirees seek the convenience of city core accommodations.

Whatever the age of residents, they are going to find a lot of amenities at Garment Street. The community will include a pet run, an outdoor sports park, an outdoor leisure area, a pool, a yoga studio, a gym, an indoor party room, and a lobby that can serve as an informal co-working area. The office building will be similarly “amenity-rich.”

Zehr believes the development will naturally draw retail and restaurant clients for the ground-floor spaces available to them, because when complete, there will be about 1,000 Garment Street residents, another 1,000 people working in the office spaces, and plenty of other neighbours each to hang out on

new patios.

The partners in the Momentum Partnership is involved are collaborating on two other projects – the 31-storey “Charlie West” building at Charles and Gaukel Streets, and a factory conversion project in Guelph.

Both Don Zehr and Brian Prudham were born and raised in Waterloo Region, and there is a strong sense of hometown pride evident when the men talk about their work. They have the opportunity to help restore vitality to the Kitchener city core, and they’re determined to make that happen, and soon.

“You have to give credit to Carl Zehr and city council. That [investing in bringing new institutions and businesses to the city core] wasn’t all that popular of an idea, when they set up that fund.”

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FAMILY HAS BUILT A HALF-BILLION-DOLLAR BUSINESS

Flanagan Foodservice adapts to change, while maintaining family ownership

BY PAUL KNOWLES

Dan Flanagan

Three Flanagans, three different perspectives. Sitting around the board room table are Dan, Murray and Sarah Flanagan, all members of the Flanagan family which has, in 42 years, accomplished an almost unheard-of level of success.

Flanagan Foodservice was founded by Joe Flanagan – Murray and Dan's father – 42 years ago, as a discount grocery store that soon added delivery services, transporting groceries in the back of Joe's station wagon.

Just over four decades later, Flanagan Foodservice is a half-billion-dollar company. Flanagan's has experienced growth every single year through its history – and with a gigantic new customer having just signed on, will certainly see significant growth this year and next.

Braced for change

All three Flanagans are excited about the immediate future in their company. And all are braced for change.

Dan is just completing a 21-year stint as President and CEO – coincidentally, the same length of time his father held the position. Joe died in 2000, at the age of 57.

In February, Dan handed over the role of President to Dan Lafrance, who comes to Flanagan Lafrance with more than 25 years' experience in the consumer and packaged goods industry. Lafrance most recently held the position of Canadian vice-president of sales and food service for the Kraft Heinz Co.

Dan told Exchange Magazine that he is excited about the change. At one time, all four sons of Joe and Dee Flanagan – Dan,

Rick, Jeff, and Murray – held leadership roles in the company. But Dan's brothers gave up their day to day responsibilities some years ago – the family remains the ownership group – and he was left as the sole family representative on site, and as the public face of the company. That, he says, was a lot of responsibility on a number of fronts. A few years ago, Flanagan's brought in a Chief Operating

Officer; upon his departure, the decision was made to split Dan's responsibilities and hire a new President.

Murray actually retired from Flanagan's six years ago, but in 2019, at Dan's request, he

returned as interim Vice President of Finance. He is now phasing back out of that role.

Sarah is Dan's daughter. She joined the company eleven months ago, under a brand-new Leadership Development program, created, she says, "to introduce my generation into the family business."

A genuine family business

With annual revenues tracking at \$560 million, Flanagan's may not be a stereotypical family business. But make no mistake – it is a family business, heart and soul. The three Flanagan's shared with Exchange the steps necessary to retain that reality in the face of almost overwhelming growth.

And "growth" has been the operative word at the company from the very beginning. Some of the figures are almost staggering – Flanagan's has facilities in three locations, totalling 445,000 square feet – and that doesn't include their one Roseland Produce or three

Once a year, all stakeholders attend a Flanagan family retreat which focus on three distinct categories – family, ownership, and business.



STOP Restaurant Supply businesses. Nor does it include their new 50% ownership with a food distributor in Moncton, New Brunswick – which has opened up the Maritime provinces to the company.

The entities carrying the Flanagan's brand (not the subsidiaries) have 580 employees. Flanagan's serves food industry customers all over Ontario and in western Quebec, with a fleet of 85 trucks. And – this is the big news at the moment – the company has just signed up the majority of Ontario Subway outlets, which Dan says will boost business by about 25%.

Flanagan's three locations include Kitchener (with a 200,000 square foot warehouse and distribution centre, and a 20,000 square food head office building), Whitby (with 180,000 square feet) and Sudbury (45,000 square feet).

The Whitby location is new; Flanagan's purchased an 80,000 square foot facility, and added 100,000 square feet of refrigerated storage space, a \$25 million project in all.

The new location then took over the business being handled by a Flanagan facility in Owen Sound, which was closed down. And the Flanagan family's feeling for their family of employees is obvi-

“We attend a lot of family business conferences, and it has been a help, no question. I promote it. You learn so much.”

ous as the three of them talk about that strategic decision. It was right for the business, but difficult for some employees. All Owen Sound employers were offered jobs at other Flanagan locations (drivers and sales people could all be kept), or they could take a generous buy-out. Dan believes the company succeeded in being fair to its employees in a difficult situation.

The concept of “growth” also applies to the Flanagan family, which continues to own the private company. Once a year, all stakeholders attend a Flanagan family retreat – and the number of stakeholders has grown. Mother Dee Flanagan is the matriarch of the clan; the four brothers and their spouses are involved; there are 10 members of the third generation (including Sarah, and Murray's son, Matt, who works part-time for Flanagan's as the only other

family member actually employed there); and two of these third generation members now have significant others who are also included in the retreats – totally 21 in all, to date.

The retreats focus on three distinct categories, says Murray – family, ownership, and business. The family time is fun time; ownership is seen as distinct from business operations, and that distinction is key to allowing the company's leadership – now almost entirely non-family – to function.

Leadership Development

This does not mean there will not be family leadership in the future; in fact, Sarah's Leadership Development program is all about preparing her for a leadership role in the company. Her time is divided between job shadowing and hands-on work. She is moving through the various Flanagan departments, from HR to shipping – and yes, she has spent her hours hauling boxes.

She told Exchange that when she first started into the program –

“We are definitely more strategic now than we used to be, having strategy, a plan, and priorities. Everything's aligned around these... We're more laser-focused.”

as the first-ever Leadership Development participant – there was more emphasis on job shadowing, but she quickly realized that she wanted hands-on experience, and the program has been adapted to make it more practical.

Sarah has also joined two Flanagan committees (food safety, and culture), and is heading up the driver recruitment effort – a key role at a time when drivers are hard to find.

Exchange asked if other Flanagan third-generation family members will also be brought into the Leadership Development stream; the answer underscored the focus Flanagan's has on cutting-edge professionalism. Having the right last name may mean you have an ownership share, but it certainly does not guarantee a job at the company. Dan explains that to qualify for the Leadership Development program, a family member has to have a post-secondary degree or diploma; must have at least two years of outside work experience; must gain the approval of all four Flanagan brothers; and must apply to, be interviewed by and approved by a committee of non-family leaders at Flanagan's.

It's a rigorous process; and that probably helps to explain why this family business is also a wildly successful business by any measure.

Dan and Murray agree that the recruitment of non-family leadership has been a major plus for Flanagan's. Dan also stresses that success has come because of “the employees. They make it happen, every day.”

He points out that, “we try and do a good job of engaging them and making them happy to be here, being open, transparent, treating them fairly.”

Murray says this has been achievable because Flanagan's has traditionally had “a fairly flat organizational structure.”

But at the top at Flanagan's – apart from the CEO's office – are a lot of names that are not “Flanagan.” And that, says Dan, is one way to guarantee the company is always getting “new blood, new



Murray Flanagan

ideas.”

He adds, “We are definitely more strategic now than we used to be, having strategy, a plan, and priorities. Everything’s aligned around these – objectives, performance management, compensation. We’re more laser-focused.”

But he’s not negating the experience, skills and integrity that the Flanagan family has brought to the business has been unimportant. “We’ve all got certain skills. The more skills, and the higher level of skills, you get within your organization, the better off you will be.”

Murray adds that bringing in outside expertise has been important because since Joe made his first delivery with the station wagon, “we’ve grown up in the business. Our experience has been very narrow.”

Having been away from the day to day for six years, on his tem-

porary return Murray found a company that has “a higher degree of accountability... I attribute that to some of the senior leaders we have brought in.”

Flanagan’s has also created an advisory board, bringing together four outside experts to bring their skill and vision to the company, from a governance perspective. The Flanagan leaders interviewed 10 possible members of that board, and chose four – Dennis Grimm, Anthony Longo, Hugh Loomans and Laryssa Topolnysky.

The Flanagans make it clear that while having non-family leadership at the top may be seen as a succession plan, it does not indicate there is any intention on the part of the family to sell the company. Murray points out that, while family business succession often involves outright sale of the company, “it doesn’t have to be that. There are many family businesses that have no family leadership at all.”

Outside leadership “may fill a gap between generations of a family.”

Dan notes that those are often the larger businesses. And Murray adds a fillip to the discussion. The other possibility is that outside leadership “may fill a gap between generations of a family.”

Flanagan Foodservice may be a non-typical family business – because of its size, and the presence of non-family leadership – but the Flanagans clearly see themselves in those terms. They are involved in key family business organizations – Dan is a Past-President of the Centre for Family Business, and Murray is on the national board and local advisory board of FEX (Family Enterprise Xchange).

Murray says that Flanagan has “implemented a lot of best practices” learned through those associations, and Dan adds, “We attend a lot of family business conferences, and it has been a help, no question. I promote it. You learn so much.”

One suspects that the other family businesses at such gatherings could also learn a great deal from the Flanagan family who have built a discount grocery store into a half-billion-dollar enterprise. **X**

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MBA STUDENTS STUDY THE BLUES

TD Kitchener Blues Festival welcomes in-depth analysis by team from Laurier business school

BY EXCHANGE MAGAZINE

Left to right Christine Dale, Hannah Ellingham, Michelle Qu, Maegan East, Erin Walker and Ola Adewuyi

The TD Kitchener Blues Festival, now in its 19th year, is a major success story. The Festival has grown by leaps and bounds, managing to continue its unlikely tradition of presenting almost every show free of charge, and still paying the bills.

It's a model that other festivals could choose to study. Instead, the Blues Festival has invited an intense, academic examination of its own operations, with the intention of finding ways to get better. As Blues Festival treasurer Bob Westhaver explains, "If you aren't open to change, the world will change around you."

So the Festival board has welcomed a team of six MBA students from Wilfrid Laurier University's Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, who have launched a wide-ranging analysis of the Festival operation.

The team of six students – Maegan East, Michelle Qu, Erin Walker, Hannah Ellingham, Christine Dale and Ola Adewuyi – represents a diverse mix of professions: two accountants, an actuary, a fashion designer, an HR director and a dentist. What they have in common is an interest in not for profits.

This project is the "capstone" of their MBA program. Typically, it sees a team go to a business, where their project is quite narrow-focused on one aspect of a for-profit enterprise. But Maegan East has been a volunteer with the Blues Festival for four years,

and she recognized that studying a not for profit would allow her and her colleagues to broaden the study's focus, and look at many more aspects of the organization.

She approached Westhaver and Festival President Rob Barkshire, and they were enthusiastic. Barkshire quickly realized the value of the service there were being offered – "I was astounded by the talent in the group," and Westhaver believes the Festival has nothing to lose and everything to gain. "I want to hear feedback. Maybe something will come out of left field that would be a way to improve our event. I'm open to having other studies."

He adds, "This is a great opportunity for us, and also a great opportunity for Laurier."

The team of MBA students began the study in January of this year, and continues at time of writing. There is a significant amount of research involved, including interviewing all 11 members of the Festival Board, other stakeholders and interested people (including the Director of Planning for the City of Kitchener).

The team was given carte blanche to study the Festival. The six colleagues began by looking at the general operations of the Festival, and creating "a statement of worth." They decided that they could provide the best value for their "client" – the Festival – by examining things that funnel into the long-term sustainability of the event, ranging from beverage operations to grants and spon-

"Our goal is to get their perspective, an outsider's perspective on what we are doing and how we are doing it, and whether we could be doing it better."



sorship.

They have not completed nor presented their report – Barkshire says, “We’re anxious to see it. Our goal is to get their perspective, an outsider’s perspective on what we are doing and how we are doing it, and whether we could be doing it better. We need to be open-minded. If we like it – which I am sure we’re going to – we’ll look at how to move from A to B.”

The Laurier team could not comment on actual findings at the time of this interview, but made it clear that they believe the Blues Festival is “an amazing event. We’re very lucky to be working with the Kitchener Blues Festival. The more research we do, the more amazed we are at how strong and how impactful it is... It just keeps growing and the experience just keeps getting better.”

Growing off stage

Speaking of growth, Barkshire and Westhaver admit to a bit of frustration that some of the key growth – important programs of the Kitchener Blues Festival – continues to be under the public radar, even though the Festival is working hard to serve its community, beyond the limits of the four-day event.

For example, they point to the “Blues in Schools” program. The Blues Festival hires musicians for a week in the spring and a week in the fall, and arranges for them to play in local schools, one school each morning and another in the afternoon. In the course of a year, these musicians/mentors will appear in 20 elementary and secondary schools in the region.

The goal, says Westhaver, is “basically to inspire young people to get involved with music.” This is not just a few kids – hundreds may attend the sessions, and since the program started, “We’re up to 60,000 students”.

The Kitchener Festival adapted the idea from American “Blues in Schools” programs, and have brought musicians from the US to Waterloo Region, but are also employing local musicians like John McKinley. Says Barkshire, “John really does make that connection between what the kids are listening to, music-wise, and how it came from the blues.”

Everyone involved in organizing and running the event is a volunteer, leaving maximum funds available to pay the musicians at a rate well above what they might get for a regular, local gig. The volunteers behind the Festival are determined that, as a not for profit community organization, they will make a positive

In the course of a year, these musicians/mentors will appear in 20 elementary and secondary schools in the region.

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impact on their community.

So they were delighted when the Kitchener BIA – a long-time partner with the Blues Festival – asked them to organize a celebration at Kitchener City hall on the Saturday of the Ion LRT Train launch. Says Barkshire, “We have proven we’re pretty good at what we do, so we were asked... we have hired five acts.”

The community impact of the Festival is quite significant. It ranges from the free pancake breakfast offered to anyone who shows up, as part of the Sunday Gospel Breakfast at the Festival, to the Youth Legacy Showcase, which highlights local young talent – and gives the winner of the competition a paid gig on a Festival stage, and a track on that year’s compilation CD.

Says Barkshire, “Quite a lot of the musicians who have competed in the Youth Legacy Showcase have gone on to music careers and are doing quite well, locally and beyond.” The organizers see this as a valuable educational tool for the young participants.

And of course, the Festival team is proud of their impact on downtown Kitchener, and the region as a whole. The Festival brings a huge number of people to the region; they stay in the hotels, they eat in the restaurants, they go to the clubs and pubs (where the Festival organizes the famous 12-Bar Blues after-hours performances).

Barkshire loves that element of the Festival. “It’s pretty exciting for a fan like me to see a blues artist, the level of whom you’re not going to see in a club, and you’re certainly not going to see them in a club in Kitchener, but because they’re playing in the Festival you can go into a club and see them in that intimate atmosphere. Those are special events – something cool and something different.”

Bottom line: the Kitchener Blues Festival is thriving, making a difference in its community far beyond the four days of the headline event... and its organizers are eager to learn, from a team of six MBA students, how they can make it even better.

The four-day Festival runs August 8-11, 2019; for all the details, kitchenerbluesfest.com.

X



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Tom Galloway has been Regional council's point man on Light Rail Transit

LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT IS FINALLY A REALITY IN WATERLOO REGION – at least, so far, in the northern part of the Region. Following years of planning, construction and testing, the ION LTR was launched June 21, 2019. The grand opening event took place at ION Fairway Station.

Holding the event at Fairway Station allowed the opening ceremony to highlight the ION bus connection from Fairway Station in Kitchener to Ainslie Street transit terminal in Cambridge – the first step to light rail in Cambridge. Celebrations were held across the region throughout the weekend, including a day-long concert at Kitchener City Hall square.

Waterloo Regional Council has also endorsed Stage 2 ION route: light rail transit from Kitchener to Cambridge. The project team “Preferred Refinement” between Shantz Hill Road and Eagle Street North at William Street has been approved. The Preferred Route was endorsed in June 2018, subject to further evaluation in the subject area. The Preferred Refinement was identified after further evaluation of route refinements and public consultation. Preliminary design will be completed in fall 2019. The route connects Kitchener and Cambridge making stops at Sportsworld, Preston, Pinebush, Cambridge Centre Mall, Can-Amara, Delta, Main and downtown Cambridge.

THE ONTARIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE has prepared a comprehensive list of economic recommendations, and presented it to the provincial government, in a document addressed to Ontario Finance Minister Vic Fedeli. Ontario Chamber President Rocco Rossi told the Minister, “As of 2019, the size of Ontario’s public debt has reached \$347 billion, with forecast interest payments of \$12.5 billion to service that debt in 2018-2019. The magnitude of Ontario’s debt makes our province vulnerable to rising interest rates, reduces government capacity to make productivity-enhancing investments, as well as places an unjustified fiscal burden on young Ontarians.”

Rossi added, “A thriving private sector is the most important source of employment, innovation and growth.”

The Chamber offered a lengthy list of economic policy recommendations, including:

Tax Competitively: a. Establish tougher penalties for tax noncompliance; b. Create a variable small business deduction and delay taxation on corporate income growth to overcome Ontario’s scale-up challenge; c. Maintain the current mining tax rates for remote,

non-remote, and diamond mining operations; d. Preserve provincial tax exemptions on employer health and dental plans; e. Modify the Municipal Accommodation Tax to protect tourism industry competitiveness.

Enhance Fiscal Capacity for Municipalities: a. Gradually increase the Heads and Beds Levy on institutions; b. Fix the interest arbitration system for fire and police services.

Address Ontario’s Infrastructure Deficit: a. Leverage the private sector to expand broadband access; b. Restore passenger rail in Northern Ontario by partnering with the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Adopt Sustainable Spending Models: a. Use value-based procurement to more effectively spend taxpayer money; b. Implement user-pay models and means testing for certain government services; c. Direct business support to where it is needed most; d. Leverage technology to increase public sector cost efficiency.

A STUDY PREPARED WATSON AND ASSOCIATES ECONOMISTS and presented to Waterloo Regional Council in April suggests that increased development charges in the Region will have a dampening affect on residential construction. According to the report, new housing units reached a peak in 2016, at 4,205 units in the region. The year 2017 saw a sharp decline, to 2,430 units; 2018 saw 3,832.

However, estimates for each year, from 2019 through 2025, project only 3,258 units annually, increasing in the project to 3,518 in the next here years, through 2028.

Kitchener had offered a break from development charges, which ended earlier this year. The forecasts appear to conform with predictions in early 2017 that suggested a building boom in Kitchener that would wane with reinstatement of DCs in 2019.

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Guelph facility to become Canada's first brewery to achieve 3RCertified status.

Established in 2012, 3RCertified is a voluntary program originally funded by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks that evaluates how organizations manage solid waste using pre-established criteria. Status is awarded at one of four levels based on

the total number of points earned following on-site third-party evaluation. 3RCertified also helps business understand their waste diversion and disposal performance, and most importantly, track and measure performance against goals.

"Our approach to waste is to simply avoid it wherever possible," says Dave Klaassen, VP of Operations & Logistics at Sleeman Breweries. "We are proud to offer our customers and employees the knowledge that we are taking active steps to divert as much material as possible from disposal at our Guelph facility, and look forward to continuing to meet our sustainability goals."

CAUDLE'S CATCH, Waterloo Region's iconic seafood business, as expanded their retail operations to meet the demand of a growing and loyal customer base, adding online sales to their six retail outlets. Caudle's Catch is headquartered at their 3,000 square foot seafood superstore in Kitchener, with locations inside Vincenzo's in Waterloo, the Victoria St Market, the Cambridge Market as well as the St. Jacobs and Kitchener Markets.

Most recently, Caudle's Catch Seafood has expanded to offer their seafood products online. As demand for seafood continues to grow, Caudle's is reaching out to offer their products to individual consumers across Canada. From a two-person family business,


Caudle's Catch Seafood has grown to offer Canada-wide wholesale operations, and six retail locations with over 40 employees.

THE 13TH ANNUAL INSPIRING WOMEN EVENT, sponsored by the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and the Waterloo Region Small Business Centre, will be held September 19, 2019. This event is designed to motivate, inspire, connect and celebrate women in business, professionals, entrepreneurs and corporate leadership. Since its inception in 2006, over 7,000 women have participated in this unique event.

BRIDGIT INC., A FEMALE-FOUNDED AND LED DEVELOPER OF MOBILE APPLICATIONS for the construction industry, has received \$750,000 from the federal government's FedDev Ontario fund. Bridgit Inc.'s mobile software management tool, Closeout, enables users to log, assign and track new and ongoing project tasks using editable photos. This eliminates the manual paper process by streamlining workflows and communication with an easy-to-use app that offers daily emails, real-time conversation and weekly task reminders.

"This project will allow Bridgit to not only develop more products to increase our overall market opportunity, but to support the local community through the growth of our team," said Mallorie Brodie, Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder, Bridgit Inc. With this investment, Bridgit Inc. will scale up business operations and expand into new and existing markets. This project will allow the company to undergo product refinement through late-stage testing, develop and launch an additional product, and create 12 highly skilled jobs in Kitchener.

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New CFFB Vice President Michelle Tupman.

membership. "We want to ensure that family businesses have the opportunity to obtain user-friendly education on issues like governance and risk management."

Succession planning is always one of the top issues for family businesses, and that applies to the CFFB, as well. Baker, who also served as president in 2013-2015, is com-

"We want to ensure that family businesses have the opportunity to obtain user-friendly education on issues like governance and risk management."

mitted to bringing the next generation into the organization, and is pleased that the new vice president is from that newer generation – Michelle Tupman, vice president of Great Canadian Holidays.

Tupman's election, says Baker, presents "an opportunity to connect in better ways with another generation."

"Connect" is an important word for Baker, in his role at CFFB. He wants to connect with the members, to be sure they are getting the value they want in their organization; he

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The Centre For Family Business Gala featured a 50's theme. Milestone awards presented included: Home Care Assistance - CFFB's newest members, five years; Spirited Leaders - 10 years; The RaeLipskie Partnership - 30 years; Yahn Custom Plumbing - 30 years; Great Canadian Holidays & Coaches - 35 years; PM Contracting - 35 years; Weber's Fabricating - 45 years; Allan Johnston Ltd - 65 years; and Strassburger Windows And Doors - 70 years.

Below, CFFB Past-President and Leadership Award winner Donald Linders presents a congratulations certificate given for a successful succession transition to H.L. Staebler Company Ltd. Kim and Stephen Philpott's daughter Joanna Mendonca.

All Photos' by Kevin Tupman Photography



CFFB MEMBER MILESTONES



Lorna Hundt and daughter Michelle Tupman are recognized for 35 years in business by CFFB Board member and Leadership Award winner Donna Swartzentruber



Exchange Magazine Publisher Jon Rohr, presents Heather Weber and brother Scott Weber from Weber Fabricating with an award honouring their 45 years in business

Past president Sheila Hannon presents Rick Baker along with wife Roxanne, recognizing their 10 year Milestone.



Dave Gascho, presents, Lori Strassburger, with a 70 year certificate along with Dana Strassburger (far left), and president Bob Strassburger, (far right).



BUILDING ON A FOUNDATION OF VALUE

New President Rick Baker's vision for Centre for Family Business

BY PAUL KNOWLES

CFFB President Rick Baker and his son, Jack Baker, of NeuStyle Software and Systems

Rick Baker has just started a two-year term as President of the Centre for Family Business, and he has some clear, strategic goals in mind as he begins his second two-year stint in that volunteer position. His primary goal is to offer more support services to CFFB members, but he sees that as a three-step process.

He says the CFFB needs to be continually increasing the value of services provided to members; that this increased value will be a primary recruitment tool attracting more members; and that more members – and thus more revenue – will enable the not for profit organization to expand the programs and services it delivers. Make those so, and then repeat!

As Baker says, “We want to expand our membership, but we want to do it by providing value... that attracts people.”

Baker says that the CFFB is not starting from scratch – some major steps have already been taken, including the rewriting of the organization's bylaws, four years ago, which expanded the understand of what constitutes a family business, and makes membership more “inclusive”.

In the past year, says Baker, a major initiative made an immediate impact – the introduction of an annual “signature event,” for which the CFFB “brings in a high-calibre speaker from outside the community.” The inaugural signature event, held in April, 2019, featured keynote speaker Dirk Schlimm, author of “Influencing Powerful People,” and a faculty member of the ICD/Rotman (University of Toronto) Directors Education Program.

CFFB breakfast events usually attract about 100 people; this signature event, also held as a breakfast, drew 236, which Baker says

is “a record for attendance at any event in the 22-year history” of the CFFB.

The organization is also putting extra effort into its annual Gala, at which milestones in company longevity and leadership awards are presented, this year to the backdrop of a 1950's themed party.

Overall, says Baker, the Centre exists “to support, educate and energize family business people,” and in a recent address to his board, Baker outlined some objectives that he believes will help to strengthen and grow the organization. He wants the CFFB to boost the profile of family businesses in the community; to provide top quality events that support the aims of the CFFB; to communicate with CFFB members to be sure they are receiving the value they want and need; to extend the services and resources of the CFFB “to all family businesses in our community”; and “to test all of our decisions against the pillars of our mission – to support, educate and energize family businesses.”

Baker says that the major events for the next year are already planned, with final details to be arranged about the signature event. As well, he says, the CFFB is “creating workshops that complement the major events.” More innovations are in the offing, as the CFFB has just launched a search for a new Executive Director.

One of the long-time success stories of the CFFB is the round table program, which brings together small groups of family business people in a networking and mentoring relationship. Baker says there are more round tables than ever in the organization's history... and he hopes that still more will be formed.

Baker is hoping to bring more educational opportunities to the

“We want to expand our membership,
but we want to do it by
providing value... that attracts people.”



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