
SouthOkanaganStories.ca

A publication of the South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce - Vol. 1, No. 1 - Autumn 2024



The mainstreets of our communities, such as Oliver above, are home to numerous small and independent businesses that are our lifeblood. Behind each door, where owners work, is a South Okanagan Story.

Inside every business is a South Okanagan Story

The Chamber of Commerce has long been dedicated to promoting local businesses and supporting the communities where they operate. In May, 2009, the separate chambers in Osoyoos, Oliver and Okanagan Falls amalgamated as a single South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce (SOCC) to pool efforts and more efficiently represent the region.

Since late 2021, when we began the **South Okanagan Stories** project, we've been talking to businesses in all the communities served by SOCC to hear their stories – how they got started, why they chose to set up where they did, and to learn about the individuals with the vision to get started here.

It's partly an effort to show local residents and visitors some of the businesses that may not yet be familiar to them. But it's also intended to reach people contemplating moving to the South Okanagan to do business and let them learn from others who came first.

Until now, these stories and photos have only been available in electronic form: on the website **SouthOkanaganStories.ca**, or through the SOCC's emailed newsletter. This paper newsletter is intended

to give you a sample of the content and encourage you to read some of the stories online, which are illustrated with professional, colour photography.

Businesses are never static. In the nearly three years of the project, new ones have started, some have changed ownership, others have closed their doors, whether due to retirement, tough competition, or other opportunities. Some have moved to new locations, also expanding at the same time. There have been turnovers of staff and management. Yet many businesses continue to thrive as others struggle and adapt.

We hope this newsletter inspires you to take a closer look at what the South Okanagan has to offer: shopping, eating and playing locally to support the amazing businesses and entrepreneurs that help make up the fabric of our communities.

To learn more about the South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce or to become a member, please contact:

South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce
sochamber.ca / admin@sochamber.ca
250-498-6321



Martin and Trish Hahn built C3 Industries from a small shed in their backyard to a landscaping company with numerous employees. They quickly discovered there was a need for their services.

C3 Industries started in backyard shed and quickly outgrew it

When Martin and Trish Hahn took over the landscaping business C3 Industries in 2017, they decided to run it from a small shed in their backyard.

It only took about three months for them to realize they'd underestimated the local need for their services and the company's growth potential.

"We didn't think it was going to be as big a business as it turned out to be," said Trish. "We ended up kind of exploding that year and had very kind neighbours who dealt with trucks and trailers on the street and in driveways."

A year later they took over the lease of their present location, which previously housed Westminster Rentals, and in June 2021, they bought the building.

"We found out very quickly in that first year that there was such a need for the service," said Trish. "For lawn-mowing, for cleanups, for hedge pruning, and irrigation."

Soon they landed a maintenance contract with Spirit Ridge, and since then they signed maintenance contracts with the Watermark Beach Resort, and with some of the larger stratas.

In 2021, C3 obtained a contract to rebuild the 1.5 km

boardwalk at the Osoyoos Desert Centre.

They've been able to handle the demands of these contracts by attracting and retaining excellent staff.

"We just seem to have the capacity to attract the staff and hold onto them," said Trish. "We have a couple of people who have been here with us since the beginning, which is really interesting for seasonal work."

Their services include residential properties, commercial properties, irrigation, fencing and railings, and work with retaining walls and patio stones.

For now though, the focus is on intelligently managing the company's growth while maintaining safety and continuing to do a great job.

"Martin's tagline is 'it's never good enough,'" said Trish. "We don't want to ever hear that from anybody, 'that's good enough.' No it's not. It needs to be great."

C3 Industries Landscaping & Property Maintenance

6015 Lakeshore Drive

Osoyoos, BC V0H 1V1

250-498-7775

www.c3-industries.ca



Korol Kuklo, assistant winemaker at Maverick Estate Winery, came to Maverick three years ago.

Maverick Estate Winery builds upon South African roots

When Maverick Estate Winery launched more than a decade ago, it was a family operation run by South African immigrants.

The family of Schalk de Witt, his daughter Elzaan and her husband Bertus Albertyn purchased an organic orchard in 2008 and over the next two years they transitioned it into a vineyard. Their first vintage was 2011.

The winery's main building with the tasting room was designed by architect Robert McKenzie to reflect the founders' South African culture, with open beams, standing seam metal roof and stucco exterior.

The logo, "Maverick Man," represents both the pictographs of South African cave art as well as those of Canadian Indigenous art.

In April 2020, the founding families sold the winery to Andrew Windsor and Jan Nelson, who partnered with Bob and Barb Shaunessy, two of the original founders of nearby Tinhorn Creek Vineyards.

Today Windsor and Nelson are building on the original vision of the De Witt and Albertyn families, while expanding the vineyards and adding their own touches.

What do those changes look like?

"It's more just the people," said Windsor, winemaker and viticulturist. "The people drive the change. People have different personalities, different passions, and different tastes... We've been fortunate enough to find good people."

Some of those people, he adds, came from Tinhorn Creek, as he did.

This includes Korol Kuklo, assistant winemaker, who works closely with Windsor and came to Maverick three years ago after 23 years at Tinhorn.

Kuklo grew up in Kelowna and she watched her moth-

er make homemade wines in the 1960s and 1970s. Later, she became a passionate advocate for BC wines and she trained in winemaking.

Among her responsibilities is lab work involving periodic testing of the wine to make sure it's fermenting properly, to check acidity and sugars.

Maverick's 11 acres, as well as leased vineyards north of Osoyoos, have ideal silty soils, hot days, shady evenings, and cool nights. Red wines like Syrah and Merlot are planted in warmer locations, while Chardonnay and some other whites are planted in cooler vineyards.

The wine is sold through Maverick's tasting room, direct to consumers online or through their wine club, and to some restaurants and private liquor stores, said Kate Collins, DTC (direct-to-consumer) manager.

"We sell quite a bit of wine to our wine club, which is extremely popular," Collins said. "But we are small and so we're mainly servicing the BC market."

Besides the wine tasting, visitors may also take a wine tour through the vineyards.

Collins wants visitors to know that Maverick is a small winery, "dedicated to sustainable farming practices and making low-intervention, delicious wines."

"The team are very passionate about the wines and that comes across, I think, to the guests," said Collins. Kuklo shares that passion.

"I love the industry, and I love being here," she said. "It's like a family. And that shows in the wines."

Maverick Estate Winery

3974 Highway 97, Oliver, BC V0H 1T1

778-437-3133

www.maverickwine.ca



The OK Falls Hotel underwent extensive renovations before reopening in March 2023.

OK Falls Hotel once again is community meeting place

The OK Falls Hotel has been a fixture of the community's main street since the 1950s. But it's recently seen some changes culminating in its closure for more than four years, major renovations, and finally a reopening in March 2023.

The reopened hotel has a revamped bar and bistro, and the liquor store is removed and turned into a games room.

"The bar is probably the highlight of it," says Randy Stoltz, business owner of the hotel. "The whole room is just fresher and cleaner and a little more airy than it was in the past."

When Stoltz left the business in 2018, he had no intention of returning, but Garry Peters, the new landowner, talked him into it. His wife told him he was nuts.

"Feedback has been very positive," he says. "Some people miss the historic, beer parlour type of dark and dingy bar that was in the previous years. My philosophy was that I was looking to give the community something for everybody. I wanted to take out the darker element that I experienced between 2015 and 2018."

At a dart night, more than two thirds of participants were women, he says.

"If you can bring women in, then you're doing something right," Stoltz adds. "It's easy to get men into an eating or drinking establishment, but when you bring women, and they're comfortable, you're doing something right."

A big feature of the hotel's new incarnation is events that involve everyone from children to pet owners.

The key to success, Stoltz believes, is surrounding yourself with good staff and treating them well.

"Because we're on the main highway, obviously the minute we opened our doors it was successful just because the place had been closed for such a long time," says Stoltz. "People were dying for it to be open."

He says he's happy he decided to return.

"I'm really trying to give this back to the community. The hotel is kind of like City Hall of Okanagan Falls, and always has been," Stoltz adds.

OK Falls Hotel

1045 Main Street

Okanagan Falls, BC

Phone: 778-515-0500

Web: okfallshotel.squarespace.com



Mike Patterson shows the room where barrels of whiskey are aged. (Richard McGuire Photo)

Spur-of-the-moment decision led to purchase of distillery

When Mike Patterson purchased Tumbleweed Craft Distillery and Tasting Bar in the summer of 2021, it was a spur-of-the-moment decision.

He knew Osoyoos because his family vacationed there each summer, sharing space with the family of his business partner, Darren Bowman.

Sometime after Tumbleweed opened in 2017, Patterson and Bowman and their families visited the distillery on Lakeshore Drive for a tasting, and bought a couple bottles of Fireweed, a spicy spirit they especially enjoyed.

Fast forward a few years and Bowman phoned Patterson at his Abbotsford home to discuss the news that Tumbleweed was for sale.

“We should buy it,” Bowman said. “What do you think?”

Bowman gave Patterson 48 hours to make up his mind.

“I didn’t even consult my wife,” Patterson recalls. “Nothing. I just said, ‘Let’s do it!’”

Patterson jokes that he had no experience with the distillery industry other than 35 years of drinking. But he retained the original owner, Mike Green, for six months so he could learn from him the science of spirits production and techniques of mashing and distilling.

“It was a lot of work and there’s a lot behind the scenes that we didn’t anticipate,” he said. One of the biggest surprises was the amount of red tape and reporting required.

When Green and his wife first opened the distillery in June 2017, they offered five spirits, none of which needed aging.

Green had bought two custom-made copper stills from

Hillbilly Stills in Kentucky, known as ‘Big Al,’ and ‘Ginger.’

By the time Green finished his six-month stint of bringing Patterson up to speed in early 2022, they’d produced a couple years’ worth of spirits and some of the whiskeys were almost aged to maturity.

Today, Tumbleweed offers more than a dozen different spirits products.

These include aged whiskeys in different styles ranging from Canadian rye whiskey to whiskeys based on Bourbon and Scotch processes. Many of the other products are moonshines, infused with fruit, and using distilled wines instead of grains as their base.

The fruity moonshines tend to be the crowd pleasers, but the award-winning whiskeys draw in connoisseurs, who are increasingly women.

The fact that grains, fruits and other ingredients are locally, or BC grown, is another plus for local agriculture, he added.

It took a while for local residents to know that Osoyoos had a distillery.

Watching Patterson and staff promote their products at local markets, or hosting their own markets, it’s hard to imagine that Tumbleweed would remain a secret for long.

Tumbleweed Craft Distillery & Tasting Bar

#7 – 6001 Lakeshore Drive

Osoyoos, BC V0H 1V6

(778) 437-2221

www.tumbleweedspirits.com



Clayton Houweling shows a large warehouse with numerous irrigation products at Southern Irrigation.

If it moves water, Oliver's Southern Irrigation can do it

"If you don't have irrigation here in the Okanagan, you're not going to grow anything," says Clayton Houweling, front-counter and logistic lead at Oliver's Southern Irrigation.

"It's not just less crop," he adds. "It's no crop."

That's not quite true in the Chilliwack area of the Fraser Valley, where Houweling grew up on a dairy farm. But with climate change, irrigation is also becoming more common in parts of Canada that are not as dry as the Okanagan.

"When I was farming in Chilliwack, we never needed irrigation," Houweling says. "It rained a lot down there."

With warmer summers though, irrigation is increasingly necessary.

Chilliwack is home to Southern Irrigation's headquarters, and it was the first location. The company has since expanded to nine locations across Western Canada. It's also where Houweling got his start with the company in July 2018.

Southern Irrigation is owned by four Oostenbrink brothers who are based in Chilliwack. It now also has locations in Kamloops, Williams Lake, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Saskatoon, Swift Current and Outlook, Sask.

The Oliver location opened in December 2018 when the company purchased the former Nulton Irrigation at the same location on Sawmill Road.

Houweling, who is formally front counter and logistic lead, has a supervisory role, but typically pitches in where needed.

"I wear many hats," Houweling says. "I do a bunch of inside sales as well and work on operations. It's hard to put a title on it exactly."

Although agriculture is the bulk of the company's business, they also support residential irrigation, civil work, septic and other applications all involving water.

"If it moves water, we carry it," says Houweling.

Depending on the crop and location, different types of irrigation may be used: drip lines or overhead for vineyards, micro sprays for fruit trees, impact sprinklers for pastures, pivot sprinklers.

Aside from these and other kinds of irrigation, Southern Irrigation also supports other water applications such as pumps, water treatment, dust suppression, fire suppression, civil works, and landscaping.

"The farming community here is very close," he said, so when one farmer has a successful irrigation installation, a neighbour may ask who they're dealing with.

"We really love helping our customers," says Houweling. "I think that's one of the standout things here."

Southern Irrigation

5830 Sawmill Road

Oliver, BC V0H 1T9

250-485-0246

www.southernirrigation.com



Brent and Linette McClelland have built a popular smoked meat business in Kaleden while juggling it with raising a family. (Richard McGuire Photo)

Couple has made Doug's Homestead a popular meat shop

It's a Wednesday morning and customers are lined up at Doug's Homestead on Highway 97 in Kaleden to buy beef jerky before it sells out.

Their jerky is so popular that customers send in pictures for the wall of themselves in distant corners of the world wearing shirts saying: "Keep calm, the jerky's on," or "I love Doug's Homestead."

Jerky is one of the top three products, but the most popular is the bacon, say Brent and Linette McClelland, the couple who have run the business since the end of 2007. Pepperoni is the other product in the top three.

"We specialize in smoked meats," says Linette. "That's our thing. We're not like your average meat shop."

"We're more of a sausage kitchen," says Brent.

But that description doesn't cover the gamut of meat and complementary products Doug's Homestead sells. There are fresh meats such as steaks, pork chops, ham, sausages and more, as well as frozen bison burgers, sausages and meat pies. Complementary products include cheeses, pickles, mustards, and even perogies.

But nobody on staff is named "Doug."

Doug Stricker ran Doug's Homestead for about 15 years just outside Hedley, but he retired at the end of

2007, when the McClellands took over.

"I was looking for a career change," said Brent, now 52, who previously worked as a welder and pile driver. "My wife was looking for a career change, and [Doug] wanted to retire. So we started negotiating from there. And that got us out of the Lower Mainland."

Initially they operated the business outside Hedley, leasing the store from Doug. But after a while, he ended the lease so he could focus on retirement.

So the McClellands began searching for a new location "everywhere from Osoyoos to Summerland," before putting in an offer on the old Kaleden restaurant. They wanted a place they could afford to purchase and renovate.

"Working with your husband as [business] partners has its challenges," says Linette. "But we're still married. We've been through a renovation, kids, a shop and we're doing OK."

Doug's Homestead

224 Highway 97

Kaleden, BC V0H 1K0

250-497-7013

doughomestead.com

Chamber takes pulse of business community while promoting economic growth; builds on last year's BRER program

The South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce (SOCC) is once again visiting and surveying local businesses, while also promoting business retention, expansion and relocation to our communities.

The initiative this fall follows a successful initiative last year when the Chamber received funding from financial partners to run a *Business Retention, Expansion and Relocation* project, known as BRER.

"As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with a sense of pride and gratitude for the progress we have made as an organization," said Ryan Duffy, SOCC president earlier this year. "Together we have continued to attract investment dollars to our region, bolstering our business community and fostering economic growth."

The Chamber is grateful for the funding it received from the Economic Trust of the Southern Interior (ETSI-BC), a provincially supported economic development organization, as well as regional partners. These partners included the towns of Oliver and Osoyoos, as well as areas A, C, D and I of the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen.

"I would like to extend a special thank you to our supporters of the Business Retention, Expansion and Relocation Project," said Ryan. "Your commitment to our shared vision has been instrumental in driving positive change across our community."

BRER had several components.

A large-scale survey of local businesses was conducted last fall through in-person interviews by staff and volunteers known as "business walks." The additional funding enabled the Chamber to survey about 160 local businesses – significantly more than in previous years when they lacked this funding. These surveys gave a snapshot of how businesses were doing, while also helping businesses to connect with various agencies and resources able to help them.

A second component is **southokanaganstories.ca**, a website that profiles local communities and businesses. It serves both as a resource for people elsewhere who are considering moving to the South Okanagan to establish a business, as well as for local residents to find information

about what local businesses offer.

In addition to professionally written articles and photographs, the website includes well-produced videos from local videographers highlighting local business sectors.

An ongoing service the SOCC provides to its member businesses is regular networking events. These are usually hosted by a local business in conjunction with a local winery and caterer, who provide wine tasting and appetizers. The informal events allow local businesspeople to interact with others, often from different sectors.

Often local community leaders and elected municipal officials attend, increasing the networking opportunities, said Denise Blashko, SOCC manager.

Another component of the Chamber's work is advocacy on issues affecting local businesses and communities.

"Our advocacy efforts have not gone unnoticed," said Ryan. "Whether it be advocating for support for wineries through the Okanagan chambers or addressing critical issues such as invasive mussels with the Okanagan Basin Water Board, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to advancing the interests of our members and our community."

The responses to last year's business walk surveys show that the state of business is by no means uniform, with some businesses struggling and others doing well.

Of 160 responses received last year, the largest number, half, said business was fair and steady. While 23 percent said it is slow or poor, another 27 percent said it was good and increasing. About half said business was similar to the prior year, and the other half was evenly split between those saying it was worse or better.

Finding employees is a significant challenge affecting businesses. Also noteworthy is that the largest number of respondents said they have no succession plan in place for their business.

Business owners highlighted a number of areas where local businesses need help.

Now the Chamber will be focusing on outreach, advocacy, and implementing of projects and sharing of resources whenever possible.

Thank you!

To the following organizations and businesses for investing in this BRER project.

Logos of supporting organizations and businesses: ETSI BC, Oliver, Osoyoos, Sessions Outdoor Sports Inc., OC Okanagan College, McLean Construction, Spare Room Self Storage, British Columbia, Castanet, Watermark Beach Resort, South Okanagan Similkameen Medical Foundation, and Primal Electric.