

Changing careers: from farmer to trucker to sawmill operator & craftsman

by Stella Shepard



Karl Meyer holds wooden bowls he handcrafts and sells as part of his woodworking company. He has changed careers three times since arriving on PEI in 1972.

Karl Meyer of Fanningbrook is a career changer, but not by choice. He's been a farmer and a long-haul truck driver and is presently self employed. Karl owns and operates a home-based business called **Kettlegrove Sawmill & Woodworking**.

The company offers custom sawing and small project lumber sales. Karl makes products such as shingles, clapboards, and wooden bowls.

Growing up in Massachusetts, Karl raised livestock and farmed. In 1972, he moved to PEI. Karl and his wife **Cindy Rice** built a farm operation while Cindy also worked off the farm.

They have a passion for farming, and worked the Island's red soil for many years. But with continued high costs of production and low market prices, they were forced out of farming.

"Career change is not a choice for many people, but there is no such thing as secure lifetime employment anymore," says Karl. "I didn't want to give up farming but I had no choice. In my next career as truck driver, I met many people of all ages who made trucking a second or a third career."

Trucking career

Karl was 48 when he became a long-haul truck driver. "Trucking was one of the options I had because of my farm experience," says Karl. He was employed with the same company for 10 years.

"Truck driving was not my first choice, but I had to earn a living to support my four children. There were personal prices to pay, such as being away from home and family for extended periods of time.

"Although trucking was a successful career, the pressure to get off the road came from my kids. But you can't stop truck driving overnight and start another career. For a year, I shared a truck with another driver. This provided enough time to develop a new career plan."

Sawmill and woodworking career

In 2008, Karl became self employed. While farming in the early 70s, Karl owned and operated a sawmill as a hobby. As well, he grew up in an entrepreneurial home. Both parents made high-end colonial furniture. His parents are now 84, and his dad is still producing and selling wooden bowls.

"It was a natural fit to change my career to saw milling and woodworking," says Karl. "My new career is a living family inheritance from my parents and I hope at some point I can pass it onto my kids and grandchildren.

"In addition to the sawmill operation, I make wooden bowls. Crafting bowls out of trees from the family apple orchard is a way of preserving part of my family history."

Business and family support

When starting his business, Karl approached **Innovation PEI** for advice and support. He was eligible for a program called **Self Employ PEI**, which is administered through **Skills PEI**, a division of the **Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning**. The program assists individuals by providing financial support, business training, and counselling during the development and implementation of their business plan.

"I don't think that I could have started the business without the support of that program," says Karl.

"My wife Cindy is two steps ahead of me with her home-based enterprise, **Kettlegrove Soapworks**. She provides handcrafted pure goat milk soap to 20 retail outlets. I hope to share Cindy's marketing success with sales of my wooden bowls."

Family pride

"Coming to PEI was the best decision I ever made," says Karl. "My kids are very successful adults and I attribute that to growing up on PEI and experiencing the joys and struggles of farming."

For more about **Kettlegrove Sawmill & Woodworking**, contact **Karl Meyer** at 676-2713.

For more about **Kettlegrove Soapworks**, visit www.kettlegrove.com or e-mail **Cindy Rice** at soap@kettlegrove.com

For more about the **Self Employ PEI** program in Queens County, contact **Allison Ramsay**, Self Employment Business Co-ordinator at 569-7797.

For more about **Innovation PEI**, contact **Preston Llewellyn** at 838-0609.